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ASPECTS OF MAKSIM GOR'KIJ'S RECEPTION IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE (1892-1906).

BY:

© SAAKA AL-MOKTAR MINIMAANA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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DEGREE OF **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

IN

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DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

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Date: APRIL 20, 1994

DEDICATION

To my mother Bomandi, Uncle Ballanoe and my father Suglo.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies how Aleksej Maksimovič Peškov, known as Gor'kij (1868-1936) was received in Russia in the first 15 years of his career and how this affected his future place in Russian literary and cultural life. We examine how initial public and critical reaction to Gor'kij's early works, which comprised mainly short stories, a couple of novels and a body of plays, helped to establish him as a leading writer. Equally significant is the intertwining of Gor'kij's literary career with a personal biography that appealed to the average reader and to various contemporary groups active at the turn of the last century.

Following the brief introductory section on the literary and political climate in Russia at the initial stages of Gor'kij's career, as well as on the methodology employed in this study, attention is directed at the reaction of contemporary critics and literary personalities to Gor'kij's early work (1892-1906), and other factors which were important in determining his reception.

Chapters One and Two deal with the main issues involved in the assessment of Gor'kij's place in Russian literature: the role of competing groups in the pre-revolutionary period to win him over to their side, how their manoeuvres resulted in promoting his fortunes, and the controversy that later surrounded Gor'kij's image. This discussion also establishes the lasting impact of early reviews on the overall image of Gor'kij.

Chapter Three contextualizes the first three volumes of Gor'kij's collected works in the literary process of the time, and discusses the intent of Gor'kij and his publishers in the choice of stories included in them. Chapters Four, Five and Six present some of the most typical and durable reactions to Gor'kij's early work, and show how certain of these opinions came to leave their mark on the author's image. In particular, Chapter Four reviews the role of the *bosjak* theme

in popularizing Gor'kij; Chapter Five concentrates on the reception of his novels, while Chapter Six looks at literary and theatrical reviews.

The concluding chapter sums up the general findings of the dissertation. Here, we aver that while it is difficult to establish Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature, his role in its development cannot be overlooked.

The concluding chapter is followed by a bibliography and an appendix intended to familiarise readers with the main participants in the debate.

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This project would not have been possible without the specific assistance of my wife Maria esperanza, whose unfailing support kept me going on even in the most difficult of times. Suglo Adalberto, our son was of tremendous inspiration in the process.

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Introduction

The entry of Aleksej Maksimovič Gor'kij (1868-1936) onto the Russian literary scene at the turn of the nineteenth century is worthy of note, not only because it added yet another voice to a literature which had already carved itself a place in the annals of world culture, but especially because of the unique nature and timing of his voice. Before and after the death of Anton Pavlovič Čexov (1860-1904) and Lev Nikolaevič Tolstoj (1828-1910), the young and promising Gor'kij played an important role in Russian letters at the confluence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when remarkable changes were taking place in Russian political, social and cultural life. In literature, for example, realism began to lose ground, albeit slowly, to Modernism. The novel, represented in Russian literature by such giants as Fedor Mixajlovič Dostoevskij (1821-1881) and Tolstoj gradually lost ground to the short story and to plays, while folk legends and *skazki* re-emerged as a source of literary works.

In the political arena, the Russian intelligentsia became a powerful force at this time, primarily due to the absence of a developed middle class. As a result of their peculiar position in Russian society, prominent writers like Tolstoj and Vladimir Galaxtionovič Korolenko (1853-1921) were increasingly drawn into expressing opinions on political and social matters. While the motives behind this shift in focus from literary to social issues among writers are arguable and vary from writer to writer, the trend itself emphasized the significance of the link between the cultural and political life of Russia at the time. Probably because of Czarist political repression and severe censorship of

dissenting opinions in the press, literature became the battleground for political confrontation. Consequently, various political and quasi-intellectual groups threw their weight behind a growing number of literary journals and newspapers which fought for the hearts and souls of the Russian people.

It was at this time in the cultural and political life of Russian society that Gor'kij appeared on the literary scene. While it may be an exaggeration to claim that every writer of that period showed an interest in the political development of the country, a review of the major voices in literature, especially after 1910, reveals little differentiation between literary and social concerns. Writers and literary critics alike dabbled in politics and, very often, critics digressed into sociological treatises in apparent discussions of purely literary works. In fact, the mixture of literary and social concerns was so appealing at the time that books dealing with sociological matters became best sellers.

Given this background, together with Gor'kij's relatively humble origins and early personal experiences, it would have been unthinkable for him to close his eyes to social and political issues, especially as he became exposed to the more powerful and influential sectors of Russian society. Gor'kij's inability to steer clear social and political issues became more evident with the years as his work gradually included ever more visible non-literary concerns. While Soviet commentators have tried to politicize his work from its very beginnings, early reviewers of the writer's work generally agree that political concerns did not play a major role in his thinking at the time. Rather, his stories often partake of the legend and reflect traditional folk thinking. For example, "Makar Čudra" (1892), "Moj sputnik" (1894), "Ded Arxip i Len'ka" (1894), "Staruxa Izergil'" (1895),

"Pesn' starogo duba" (1889) and others deal with familiar everyday conditions and touch on the lives of ordinary Russians.

Together with other considerations that are important to the study of the literary canon and canonization, this thesis will focus on opinions expressed by contemporary critics and writers on Gor'kij's early work beginning with 1892, when he wrote "Makar Čudra", through the publication of *Mat'* in 1906. The decision to restrict this study to the period between 1892 and 1906 is due largely to two reasons. Firstly, 1906 marked the year in which Gor'kij wrote the novel that came to be regarded by Soviet critics as the seminal work in Socialist realism. This particular reference to *Mat'* as the foundation stone of the new literary doctrine, notwithstanding the nearly three decades that separated it from the official declaration of Socialist realism as a literary movement, has resulted in a huge volume of work devoted to the novel. Therefore, to include reactions to it in the present study would not only require tremendous additional research, better reserved for a separate enterprise, but could obscure the purpose of the current dissertation. It bears recalling that until Gor'kij wrote *Mat'* he had a certain appeal that cut across party and political affiliations and made him acceptable to many. The inclusion of *Mat'* here is only likely to limit the views and opinions arising from it to a particular bent; a position that does not entirely fit in with the framework adopted for this study.

By 1906, however, Gor'kij appeared to have thrown his lot behind the Russian Social-democratic party and its drive to portray the working man as the leading force in the new Russia. This led to a fragmentation of opinions about the writer in the literary community and greatly polarized the debate on Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature

in particular. While it can be argued that Gor'kij redeemed his "literariness" in *Ispoved'* two years later, his subsequent works followed the pattern that had been started in *Mat'*. Thus, it would be appropriate to say that the latter novel marked the beginning of a new era in Gor'kij's career and lies outside the general mood of the period under consideration here.

Secondly, literary-critical material available on Gor'kij's work during this period is not only extremely plentiful, this material satisfies qualitatively the needs of this particular study. There are nearly 2500 articles and books from this period alone which discuss Gor'kij's early works.[1] Given the scope of this dissertation and the vast amount of material available on the subject, obvious logistical considerations make it imperative to restrict this study to a reasonable time frame which will allow for adequate treatment of the subject.

Methodologically, this study will involve a review of critical opinions based, primarily, on the first three collected volumes of the writer's work published by Sergej Pavlovič Dorovatovskij (1854-1921) and Aleksandr Petrovič Čarušnikov (1852-1913), his first two novels and early dramatic works. More specifically, the analysis will include views on volumes I, II and III of Gor'kij's *Očerki i rasskazy*; the first two were both published in 1898, while Volume III appeared the following year with a second edition of Volumes I and II. Other works discussed include the novels *Foma Gordeev* (1899) and

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[1] S. Baluxatyj, *Kritika o M. Gor'kom: Bibliografija statej i knig 1893-1932*. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Xudožestvennoj Literatury, 1934) 529 pages. Henceforth, this book shall be referred to as *Kritika o M. Gor'kom.*, followed by the year of publication.

Troe (1901) as well as the plays *Meščane* (1902), *Na dne* (1903), *Vragi* (1905) and *Dačniki* (1906).

Also, the critical reviews and comments included in this dissertation will be arranged in a thematic and chronological manner, with a view to focusing on the major issues raised in the debate.[2] This approach is particularly useful as it allows the reader to follow the debate in a progressing manner. Additionally, it will also allow for an orderly and coherent structure which will permit the reader to isolate the main trends that were most important to participating critics. Also, such an approach will not only bring into focus the main points that were significant to Gor'kij's early work, but equally importantly, it will allow the reader to see those that were relevant in determining the author's early reception both among readers and critics.

Similarly, the organizing principle stated above will further allow readers to see the shifts in approaches toward Gor'kij and his writing among individual critics and groups. These changes are not only important because they purport to isolate and comment on shifts within the author's own work, but also because they are significant indicators to the different interests at stake in the literary community then as well. Even more importantly, by discussing the major issues Gor'kij raised in his work, and especially how the author dealt with such matters, these critics have made it possible for

---

[2] An appendix of critic-contributors will be attached to the main body of this dissertation. In it, I introduce briefly some of the critics whose views are included in this thesis. This, it is hoped, will indicate some of the attitudes and approaches to literature adopted by the most important participating critics of the day in their pronouncements about the early reception of Gor'kij in Russia.

us to see why, for example, some early admirers of Gor'kij found him intolerable later.

Finally, it is significant to mention that a thematic and chronological approach to critical opinion on Gor'kij's early work makes it possible to observe both the reaction of individual critics to the author's work, and also the reaction of critics to the ideas and approaches of their peers. This is particularly important in the case of competing and often differing groups, as happened both in the 1890s and mid-1900s respectively.

Finally, in the choice of a framework, this thesis intends to demonstrate that more than "purely" critical opinion, but also many other factors played a significant role in determining the way in which Gor'kij was received both by his contemporaries in the Russian literary community and the general public, at large. There is an attempt to marry two often conflicting approaches to the study of literature in this dissertation. These include the traditional approach, prominent in Russia in the period under consideration, which relied heavily on "the historical, which studied literary backgrounds but often ignored the literature itself; the moral-social, which treated literature as an instrument for the ethical and social betterment of man; and the philological, which included historical and linguistic studies in folklore and comparative literature"[3] and the then emerging approach at the time variously described as the Formal method or New Criticism which "involved three related activities: 1) a mounting attack against traditional academic scholarship; 2) the development of a critical theory which would separate literature from history, sociology and philosophy; and 3) the creation of a way of talking about literary

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[3] *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays.* Translated and with an Introduction by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) X.

works that would replace discussions of background, social usefulness, or intellectual content with analysis of structure."[4]

By adopting such a strategy, the methodology in this dissertation approaches the polysystem theory developed by Itamar Even-Zohar and complemented by the works of literary theoreticians of the canon and canonization such as the French scholar Pierre Bourdieu. In this approach, literature is conceived of as a system "not as an isolated activity in society, regulated by laws exclusively (and inherently) different from all the rest of the human activities, but as an integral -- often central and very powerful -- factor among the latter" [5]

Consequently, in the polysystem theory "literature" is not conceived of as either a set of texts (the most visible product of the literary system), or an aggregate of texts, or even an aggregate of laws and elements that govern the production of texts (repertoire). Rather, texts and the repertoire are only partial manifestations of literature -- or, better still, literary life -- whose behaviour can only be explained within the literary system.

It is in light of the above that Even-Zohar argues that in the process of literary canonization "texts, rather than playing a role in the process of canonization, are the outcome of these processes" (II:1, 19). Even-Zohar contends that "it is only in their function as representatives of models that texts constitute an active factor in systemic relations" (II:1, 19). The latter statement could not be more appropriate in its application

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[4] *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays.* Translated and with an Introduction by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) X.

[5] Itamar Even-Zohar, *Poetics Today*, II: 1, 2.

in Russian literary studies than in considerations of Gor'kij's early reception in Russia. For example, the effect of factors relating to politics and ideology, religion and philosophy as well as social issues and even economics, all of which were prevalent in the period under consideration, team up with the internal evolution of the Russian literary process itself to affect Gor'kij and the way he was regarded by others at the time.

These otherwise "non-literary" issues referred to above made it possible for contemporary critics to include in their observations concerns beyond the texts of Gor'kij's short stories, novels and dramatic works. Also, their presence in the debate makes it imperative for students of Gor'kij to consider a wider framework such as the one provided by the polysystem theory as an alternative to earlier methods in their assessment of the author's contribution to Russian literature. To rely solely on either the "traditional" or "formal" method would lead to a less than satisfactory resolution of the question.

Justification for a more inclusive approach lies in the fact that the Russian literary scene at the turn of the century was not only conceived of on a wider scale and operated under different (and looser) rules than we are used to today, but also yielded results which hinder the successful study of Gor'kij's reception using the more exclusive "traditional" or "formal" approach.

While admittedly this dissertation does not make a full-scale application of the polysystem theory, the frame work adopted here is well informed by it. This is mainly because the polysystem theory allows us to consider a broad range of factors involved literature and literary canonization. For example, the role played by politics in Gor'kij's reception, symbolized both in the negative and positive regard for the author by the

Czarist and Bol'ševik regimes respectively, and the great appeal Gor'kij had in the early years for various ideological groups are no less important than purely aesthetic considerations in determining his fortune in Russian literature.

Furthermore, other factors including the internal workings of the literary process as manifested in the development of new and vibrant modernists trends such as Impressionism and Symbolism; the democratization of Russian literature both thematically (a renewed interest in the peasant as a subject of literature) and demographically (an increase in readership beyond high society); the changing approach to the appreciation of writers as celebrities, and even of fashion, significantly affected the direction of Gor'kij's career, and consequently his reception. After all, there is a great chance, for example, that without the 1905 Uprising and the October Revolution of 1917 and their resultant movement of society, Gor'kij's fate could have turned out differently from what it is today.

It can be argued that the young Gor'kij obviously exhibited a certain novelty in his work that drew the attention of the literary community. It is important to remember that he attained his literary fame during the lifetime of Tolstoj and Čexov, the leading writers of Russia at the time. Besides the stature he attained at home as a talented writer, he was rated outside Russia together with the latter two as a foremost representative of Russian literature. Given this positive assessment of the young writer alongside the great names of contemporary Russian letters, it is reasonable to argue that when critics and writers expressed their private and professional opinions about Gor'kij, they must have initially reacted to his artistic originality more than anything else.

In trying to explain why Gor'kij attracted and received more attention than his numerous peers, I have chosen to review opinions of his work by contemporary critics and literary figures. In light of this, I would like to stress that the objective of this dissertation is not to judge Gor'kij, but to present other people's views about him and his work; in particular their account of why he succeeded where others failed.

The vast proliferation of material on Gor'kij, following the publication of his collected works in 1898 and 1899, has made it practically impossible to aim for a complete and exhaustive summary of all the contemporary reviews of his work. Instead, I have decided to concentrate on the most prominent contributors to the debate. Their work shall be analyzed critically and thematically with a view to providing the reader with the most comprehensive and authoritative opinions on Gor'kij at the beginning of his literary career. The list includes contemporary writers who knew him quite well, such as Tolstoj and Čexov, as well as critics who published in some of the finest journals and newspapers of the day. Among them were Gor'kij's friends and sympathizers such as Vladimir Aleksandrovič Posse (1864-1917) and Andreevič (pseudonym of Evgenij Andreevič Soloviev, 1866-1905), as well as some who were to become his enemies, including Ivan Alekseevič Bunin (1870-1953), Dmitrij Vladimirovič Filosofov (1872-1942) and Dmitrij Sergeevič Merežkovskij (1865-1941).

I shall attempt to focus on opinions and issues which directly or indirectly touched on the image of the writer and his subsequent canonization. These will include both positive and negative reviews of his works, especially in the context of contemporary Russian reality. I shall endeavour to concentrate on the literary aspects of Gor'kij's career,

while not overlooking other factors that contributed to determining the way he was seen by his contemporaries. Such factors will include the social, philosophical and political climate of the time, which, as we shall see, were often introduced into discussions about Gor'kij's image and place in Russian literature.

While all the newspaper and journal articles and books under discussion in this study are of a literary nature and ostensibly deal with the literary merits of Gor'kij's work, a number of them digress widely into other areas, especially into social and philosophical debates. A significant number of contributions to newspaper and journal articles, especially those later reprinted in book form, focus more on the relationship of the author's work to contemporary events. As a result, there is a great deal of emphasis on character analysis and the role of Gor'kij's protagonists in reflecting or modelling societal behaviour.

Yet, it must be emphasized that the critics whose opinions provide the main material for discussion in this thesis were not only some of the finest of the time, but also some of the most influential for they also edited and contributed to leading contemporary journals and newspapers. Similarly, I would like to stress that these journals and newspapers were not only central in importance, they were also located mainly in the two cultural and political centres of Russia: Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The importance of initial reactions to Gor'kij's fortunes cannot be overemphasized for the author's acceptability after 1917 was largely due to the favourable impression his work had made earlier, especially in the period under consideration here. In addition to being elevated to the level of Tolstoj and Čexov both inside and outside of Russia,

Gor'kij went on to occupy increasingly important positions as editor, publisher and advisor to other writers. As well, his economic situation strengthened, permitting him to travel abroad where he was highly regarded. In fact, the writer's sojourns to Italy, and his long stay there both before and after the October Revolution made him very popular in that country.

On another level, initial reaction to Gor'kij's work is important because it captured the socio-historical context of the time and reflected the main mood and spirit of turn-of-the-century Russia; a country that faced enormous difficulties especially in the wake of the shattering defeat it suffered at the hands of the Japanese in 1904. Indeed, works in Gor'kij's oeuvre which may appear to todays readers to be stale and unexciting had a particular meaning in their day, especially in light of the topical nature of the subjects the writer dealt with. This was particularly so for Gor'kij's most widely acclaimed dramatic works (*Meščane* and *Na dne*) which appeared only a few years before the events of 1905.

It is significant to mention that Gor'kij expressed himself in a variety of literary genres and changed positions on various issues as he matured and widened the scope of his concerns. As a result, various commentators on his work also changed their views and assessment of the writer in response to the subjects he dealt with. For example, earlier admirers and supporters of Gor'kij, like Bunin and Merežkovskij, became some of his most bitter enemies, particularly after the events of 1917 when they found themselves on different sides of the political divide. As this example shows, literary factors were not always the sole or even the major concern in the assessment of Gor'kij by many critics. With time, the controversy over his merit grew as he began to include still more

contentious and controversial issues in his work.

The fact that Gor'kij was further embroiled in controversy has resulted in a further complication in properly assessing his contribution to Russian literature and culture. In fact, Gor'kij's opposition to the status quo at the beginning of his career, and his later collaboration with the Bol'ševiks have resulted in Soviet critics extrapolating his later image onto his earlier achievements. And while the determination of Soviet critics to tie Gor'kij to the seat of Soviet power glorified him as the forerunner of proletarian art in the Soviet Union, this particular association appears, paradoxically, to have taken away from the otherwise substantial literary merits of the writer, especially in the pre-revolutionary period.

Such difficulties, as stated above, have given the present study added dimensions and new meaning in the sense that they serve to raise the age-old debate on the relationship between esthetic value and extra-literary factors in contributing to and determining the acceptance and popularity of writers. Thus, in addition to accomplishing the primary objective of demonstrating how Gor'kij was received in Russia at the initial stages of his long and often difficult career, this thesis shows that his success and canonization are interesting beyond Gor'kij studies both as a test case of how non-literary factors influence the evaluation and reception of writers, and also of how factors directly related to esthetic evaluation remain relevant.

Still on the role of non-literary factors in the assessment of Gor'kij's place in Russian literature, it is fitting to point out that the topical nature of the majority of his work did not facilitate an esthetic debate. Commentators on the writer's work suppressed

the purely literary aspects of his prose and poetry as they quickly saw in them the events and individuals in society to which his work corresponded. The tendency among many critics was to digress to the detriment of the esthetic qualities of the works into sermons on particular social events of the time. Not surprisingly, this has resulted in enormous difficulties in explaining the wide acclaim of Gor'kij's work.

Thus, whatever the real reasons for Gor'kij's success, the fact still remains that while it would be unfair to attribute the author's success wholly to the sociological approach adopted by contemporary critics and the topicality of the subjects he dealt with in his oeuvre, there is no denying that the latter two elements play an important role in the general reception of the writer at the turn of the century.

Moreover, contemporary critical debates over Gor'kij must be put in the context of a struggle by the leading minds of Russia for the heart and soul of the nation. In light of the above, it became increasingly possible and acceptable to debate every imaginable subject in religious, philosophical and political terms. It is precisely for this reason that the inclusion of non-literary factors in most of the reviews under consideration here should not come as a surprise. Also, in order to put the debate into perspective, I shall attempt to give a general indication of the tendencies expressed both by the critics whose work is included here, and of the literary organs in which they published. This will help to sort out some of the biases that are not always obvious in the texts at first sight. It will be seen, for example, that after a relatively ideology-free beginning, Gor'kij wavered between different approaches in later years. Yet, certain commentators on his work were firm in their support for or opposition to him, irrespective of the ideological slant he

expressed. Still, there are others who shifted their position and loyalty to him based on the subjects he dealt with and the manner in which he did so. It is my intention to lead the reader through some of these fairly subtle pitfalls in the assessment of Gor'kij's place in Russian literature.

Two bibliographies among others play a major role in the references and studies conducted in this thesis. They are Sergej Baluxatyj's *Kritika o M. Gor'kom: Bibliografija statej i knig 1893-1932*. (Leningrad: GIXL, 1934), 592pp; and Edith Clowes' *Maksim Gorky: A reference guide. 1868-1936*. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 226pp. While the latter is more recent and includes non-Russian entries, particularly from the English-speaking world, the former which relates more directly to the period and essence of this dissertation provided the bulk of the references in this thesis. Therefore, I have decided to comment briefly on the contents and composition of this primary source with a view to explaining how it affected my findings.

In the introduction to his 1934 edition of *Kritika o M. Gor'kom: Bibliografija statej i knig 1893-1932*, Baluxatyj points out that despite Gor'kij's place in Russian literature, bibliographers have paid very little attention to him. With almost no predecessors in this particular area, Baluxatyj sets out to compile a concise bibliography on the writer through direct references to primary sources -- newspapers, journals and books about Gor'kij. Beginning with the first mention of his work in the newspaper *Volgar'* in 1893, Baluxatyj covers all available critical material on the writer in Russian. The resulting bibliography comprises material that appeared only in central publications.

Baluxatyj's bibliography on Gor'kij can be considered literary only in the broadest sense of the word, since besides critical, analytical and judgemental works, it includes as well: memoirs; bibliographical articles and materials; Gor'kij's social activities as well as notes on his personality, appearing in diaries and published letters of his contemporaries. Other materials Baluxatyj includes are interviews granted by Gor'kij, as well as essays commemorating Gor'kij's visit to Russia and his final return, which were published in 1927-28 and 1931-32 respectively. Still other works included in the bibliography are books and brochures dedicated partially or completely to Gor'kij and his work, critical articles in textbooks of literary criticism, scholarly articles of a methodological nature, republications of journal and newspaper articles in book form as well as forewords and introductory notes to the writer's work.

Regarding newspaper articles, Baluxatyj concentrates on the leading and most authoritative Moscow and St. Petersburg publications dedicated to literature, criticism and theatre. It is worth noting that he draws attention to the fact that these papers not only reflected the most diverse and authoritative literary and critical thought of the time, but also played a leading role in shaping the social life of the country. These include up to seventy literary newspapers and up to a hundred satirical newspapers. Altogether, Baluxatyj lists up to 450 newspapers of a literary nature and about 230 satirical newspapers in the pre-revolutionary period alone.[6]

On the other hand, Baluxatyj excludes from the bibliography all mention of Gor'kij in chronicles and for the purposes of general information, as well as the writer's

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[6] *Kritika o M. Gor'kom.*: 3.

travel plans and reprints of his work for schools and in anthologies. Similarly, he excludes comments on Gor'kij in non-literary journals as well as in non-literary contexts in literary journals. An important aspect of the work is that Baluxatyj does not include entries on Gor'kij in the non-Russian languages of the Soviet Union.

While these omissions may be insignificant in terms of their numbers, given the huge material available on the writer even in this restricted framework, their absence takes away from the thoroughness aspired to in this study. In particular, the lack of information on Gor'kij's work in anthologies, especially those used in schools inside and outside of Russia, places a limitation on assessing the popularity and acceptance of the writer. For example, while we now know that Gor'kij's work was a staple in the Soviet school system and was also read widely in other countries outside of the Soviet Union, we are unable to establish the extent to which this practice is a continuation and a result of his pre-revolutionary acceptance in Russian society.

While it was unlikely that the Czarist regime permitted the study of Gor'kij's work on a wide scale in Russian schools, given the widespread persecution of the regime's opponents including Gor'kij himself, it would have been useful to see if his work was part of the school curricula in the period before 1917 in places like Germany and France where Gor'kij enjoyed his greatest success beyond the Russian Empire. Similar mention of Gor'kij's work and their reception in the non-Russian parts of the Russian Empire, especially in places such as Tiflis, where he briefly lived and worked would have indicated how well the writer was regarded outside the immediate boundaries of Russia. Unfortunately, neither Clowes, who included foreign sources in her work, nor Baluxatyj,

who concentrated on indigenous sources, dealt with this matter.

In order to provide some perspective on the interest Gor'kij generated among his contemporaries in the pre-revolutionary years, I have chosen to tabulate the written reaction to his career according to Baluxatyj's bibliography. While the majority of references to the writer during his early career appeared exclusively in newspapers, by 1898 there was an equal number of entries in journals. In 1899 and 1900 one notes a steep progression of these numbers and by the end of 1900 there were as many as 27 books and articles in books, in addition to 86 newspapers and 31 journals in which his work was discussed. The period between 1901 and 1906 remains the most prolific and successful for Gor'kij in the pre-revolutionary years, with a peak of 586 entries in 1903 alone, and an average of over 330 entries per year for the period. The figure held steadily over the 100 per year mark until 1910 when it dropped slightly to the mid 80s, picking up again in 1913 and 1917 to over the 200 mark.

Finally, it is important to mention that reaction to Gor'kij's work in the period under discussion came from people of varied cultural and professional backgrounds and was published in newspapers and journals of various, often conflicting tendencies. Not only do these reactions come from literary historians and critics, they also originate from philosophers, linguists, fellow writers as well as political activists. This wide range of personalities and publishing organs not only demonstrates the extent to which contemporary Russia was preoccupied with Gor'kij, but also signals the diversity and controversy one finds in the criticism about him.

Chapter I of this dissertation will deal with the larger issue of assessing Gor'kij's image in Russian literature at the turn of the century. It will take into account some of the dynamics of literary criticism of the time and include a survey of some of the issues and personalities involved in this assessment. This overview is intended to lay the groundwork for subsequent reviews of various critical opinions expressed in regard to Gor'kij's short stories, novels and dramatic works. Chapter II will deal with the collection and publication of Gor'kij's early works and discuss the journals and newspapers in which they first appeared. This will be followed by a note on how these stories brought him into the limelight in contemporary Russian literature. Of primary importance here is the *bosjak* theme and how it influenced public and critical opinion about Gor'kij.

Chapter III will focus on contemporary responses to Gor'kij's early prose with a view to determining their role, both in establishing and in modelling Gor'kij's image, particularly in the years following the two revolutions in Russia.

Chapter IV will deal with Gor'kij's initial attempts at writing a novel and will discuss works such as *Foma Gordeev* and *Troe*, culminating in his most influential novel *Mother*. Here, as before, the emphasis will be on the question of how these early attempts at portraying Russian society (in a more comprehensive manner than in the preceding short stories) affected his public image.

Similarly, chapter V will discuss contemporary responses to Gor'kij's dramatic works both from the point of view of theatrical and literary figures. It is important to highlight reactions to the theatrical part of his oeuvre, for it appeared to provoke the most

immediate critical reaction. Of major significance here is the effect these plays had in helping Gor'kij to consolidate his place at home as an important contributor to Russian culture, while also establishing him on the international scene. To this end, attention shall be paid to what extent international recognition and support affected Gor'kij's image in Russia in the closely related fields of culture and politics.

Finally, chapter VI will provide a synthesis of the reviews in the preceding chapters, especially chapters III, IV and V, with a view to pointing out the main trends in the reception of Gor'kij's work in Russian literature before 1917. In particular, I shall also attempt to show the relevance of the findings arising from this dissertaion to current scholarship on Gor'kij in the wake of on-going changes in the former Soviet Union, especially in the area of literature and culture.

Chapter one

Assessing Gor'kij

It is hard to find a writer in modern Russian literature that better typifies the fusion of his character and personality with the lives and character of his heroes than Gor'kij. His literary style, moral views and social vision were all pervaded by a certain ambivalence that left critics of his work wondering about the true nature of the man and the writer. This ambivalence, which resulted partly from the writer's mixing of fiction and fact, contributed greatly to the difficulty experienced by students of Gor'kij in assessing his place in Russian literature.

Gor'kij was an intuitive observer, who had a passion for fiercely attacking the reality of contemporary Russia. More importantly for his literary career, he provided his readers with a utopian vision of life in place of the reality that he denounced. While commentators on his early works agree that they are stylistically weak, they are unanimous in pointing to their significant historical importance since they deal primarily with all the topical issues of his day (*meščanstvo*, *bosjačestvo*, *snoxačestvo*, the *intelligentsia* etc.)[7] This is evidenced by comments from various people such as Čexov, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič Blok (1880-1921) and Zinaida Nikolaevna Gippius (1869-1945), who also wrote under the pseudonym Anton Krajnyj. For example, while Čexov

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[7] *Meščanstvo*, *bosjačestvo* and *snoxačestvo* shall be rendered into English respectively as follows: philistinism, tramp nature and seigniorial authority.

contended that the issues which caught Gor'kij's attention would continue to be discussed long after his name was forgotten, Blok described his work as the truth about Russia. Similarly, Zinaida Gippius, who later became a vehement critic of the writer, claimed that Gor'kij would be remembered more for the issues he dealt with in his work than for his style.

Gor'kij's tendency to denounce the reality of the day while offering his readers his own utopian alternative by encouraging them to dream of higher truths resulted in a mix of realism and romanticism. This made him attractive to competing groups at the time. Such groups included the Conservatives, the Populists and the Marxists. While it is true that he was deliberately active in creating the legend around himself, it is important to keep in mind that, right from the onset, various radical critics and sometimes even conservative sources, contributed immensely towards that legend.

Appearing on the literary scene at a time when the Conservatives, Populists and Marxists sought writers to justify and propagate their theories of social change, Gor'kij appeared to satisfy the needs of all these groups for he was widely believed to have come from among the people. Consequently, in the fight to attract and maintain his attention, these different interest groups, active at the turn of the century, wrote positive reviews about the young and upcoming writer. For example, the Populist Nikolaj Konstantinovič Mixajlovskij (1842-1904), while suspicious of Gor'kij from the very beginning, joined hands with the Marxists Posse and Andreevič in declaring him a proletarian writer. After the first revolution of 1905, when the Bol'ševiks won Gor'kij to their side, Georgij Valentinovič Plexanov (1856-1918), Anatolij Vasil'evič Lunačarskij (1875-1933) and

Vladimir Illič Lenin (1870-1924) continued to develop his image as a man of the people.

Particularly active in promoting Gor'kij's image as a man of the people was Lunačarskij, then Minister of Education and an active participant in the literary process at the turn of the century, who supported a greater role for literature in nation building. In a series of articles and books which focused on Gor'kij's early works and his overall contribution then to Russian life and culture, Lunačarskij portrayed Gor'kij as a pioneer of the new art that would centre on the working man, and also as concrete testimony to the potential of ordinary people.[8] It is also important to mention that during the whole Soviet period, Gor'kij was canonized as the founder of twentieth-century progressive Russian literature and, above all, as founder of Socialist Realism. These achievements were celebrated through the school curriculum, cheap and frequent editions, and other institutional ways such as the naming of his birth place and other towns as well as schools and theatres, including the "Institut mirovoj literatury imeni Gor'kogo" in the Academy of Sciences and the Moscow Art Theatre in his honour.[9] While such huge

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[8] Lunačarskij's support and promotion of Gor'kij as a harbinger of a new and democratic literature is particularly visible in his numerous defences of the writer around 1905, when a group of literary personalities led by Filosofov launched a bitter attack on Gor'kij in which they forecast his final fall as a writer. Probably the most important of these works is "O xudožestvennom tvorčestve i o Gor'kom" in *Revolucija i kul'tura*. 5:11-18 in which Lunačarskij asserted that contemporary arguments about Gor'kij's origins were missing the point; he claimed that the importance of the writer lay in the fact that, he, like the great leaders of the revolution, understood the role the working class would play.

[9] An anonymous writer discussed the hundreds of Soviet cities, towns, businesses and parks named after Gor'kij in the front page of the June 16, 1951 edition of *Literaturnaja gazeta*. It is estimated that during the Soviet era, there were as many as 1000 collective farms, 200 schools and 100 libraries which carried the

enterprises aimed at enhancing Gor'kij's image in later years lie outside the scope of the present dissertation, their importance for the overall reception of the writer both inside and outside of the then Soviet Union makes it worthwhile for an occasional look forward; this is especially so because the Soviet canonization of the author has succeeded in obscuring his pre-revolutionary image.

The subject of Gor'kij's image has never been conclusively dealt with in Russian literary criticism. Important though the writer has been in forming Soviet literature in particular, there is no definitive consensus on Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature. This fact was probably expressed best by Bunin when he lamented in his attacks against Gor'kij:

> O Gor'kom, kak éto ne udivitel'no, do six por nikto ne imeet točnogo predstavlenija. Skazočno voobšče étogo čeloveka. Vot uže celyx 40 let mirovoj slavy, osnovannoj na besprimerno sčastlivom dlja eë nositelja stečenii ne tol'ko političeskix, no i ves'ma mnogix obstojatel'stv. Konečno, talant, no vot do six por ne našlos' nikogo, kto skazal by nakonec o tom, kakogo roda éto talant, sozdavšij, na primer, takuju vešč', kak "Pesnja o sokole"...[10]

While Bunin's overall assessment of his former friend's contribution to Russian literature and culture are emotionally charged and revisionist, the questions he posed and the ensuing debate among the émigré press as well as back in Russia underscore the importance of determining Gor'kij's contribution to Russian letters.

Much material in the Soviet period praises Gor'kij's outstanding lead in creating a popular proletarian literature that put the individual at its centre. On the other hand,

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writer's name.

[10] Ivan Bunin, *Petropolis*. I: 58.

critics of Gor'kij tend to dismiss him as a literary nonentity and an accomplice of the Bol'ševik regime, who subordinated the arts to state politics. Gor'kij's acclaim by Soviet critics as the founder of a proletarian literature did not always go unchallenged even in the early Soviet period. For example, in the 1920s while he was in exile in Capri, certain prominent writers, including Vladimir Vladimirovič Majakovskij (1893-1930), questioned the incompatibility of the writer's *meščanin* origins and the claim by certain critics that he was the founder of Soviet proletarian art.[11] Although supporters of Gor'kij, led by Petr Semenovič Kogan (1872-1932) and Lunačarskij, successfully countered by arguing that he, like Marx and Lenin, at least, possessed a proletarian consciousness and that his greatness lay in his ability to recognize the leading role of the proletariat in the future development of society,[12] this matter remained unresolved. In fact, the intervention in support of Gor'kij through the use of icons of the Soviet regime has only served to complicate matters and thus make a favourable resolution of the problem more difficult.

Probably because Gor'kij owed a great deal of his legend and early fame to the role of strong, politically-minded individuals like Mixajlovskij, Posse and Andreev earlier in his career, and Lunačarskij and Lenin later, his relationship with these people and the groups they represented went a long way to influence the assessment of his overall image in Russian literature. This is particularly evident in his relationship with the Bol'ševiks since his reputation with Soviet critics and readers became intrinsically linked with Lenin

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[11] V. Majakovskij, "Pismo pisatelju A.M. Gor'komu" in *Novy lef*, No. 1 (January): 2-6.

[12] A. Lunačarskij, "O Xudožestvennom tvorčestve i o Gor'kom" in *Revolucija i kul'tura*. 5: 11-18.

and the October Revolution. Gor'kij, in his relationship with Lenin, was cajoled and bullied into accepting and conforming with the latter's political ambitions, so that his work became a justification for, or even construably the forerunner of, Lenin's political programmes. This partnership came to dictate the relationship between politics and the arts in the Soviet Union in many ways.

Just as Gor'kij subjected his literary career to Lenin and the Bol'ševiks, art in the Soviet Union, to a large extent, became a junior partner of politics, with its future and development intrinsically linked with politics. In fact, the subjugation of literature to politics in the Soviet Union became so complete that some Western critics such as Edith Clowes have argued aptly that to change the Gor'kij legend, which is closely linked with the name of Lenin, would amount to "legitimizing a different kind of relationship between cultural institutions and the government."[13] She observed in this connection that:

> the established icon of the "proletarian father of Soviet letters" and the hallowed friendship between Lenin and Gorky hinder a factual assessment of Gorky's relationship to the Bol'ševiks and his view of politically engaged literature.[14]

The argument remains that to arrive at a proper assessment of Gor'kij's place in, and contribution to, Russian literature would require dismantling the wall that surrounds his name in Soviet literature. This would require a thorough examination of his contribution to Russian literature, particularly at the beginning of his literary career -- an

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[13] Edith Clowes, *Maksim Gorky: A reference guide. 1868-1936.* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987) xv.

[14] Edith Clowes, *Maksim Gorky: A reference guide. 1868-1936.* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987) xv.

examination freed as much as possible from the temptation to project his later place in Soviet society onto his achievements during the Czarist period.

As I have mentioned, Gor'kij himself was very active in the creation of his literary legend. From his choice of the pseudonym "Gor'kij" at the very beginning of his career in favour of his "civil" name Peškov, to his acquiesence with the Soviet regime in later years, the writer encouraged the building of the legend around himself. While the name "Gor'kij" has lost its poignancy and thus come to be regarded in our time as inconsequential, in the 1890s it resonated of the writer's anger and daring and had a certain significance for the average Russian reader. Translated into English as "bitter", it signalled the entry into Russian literature of a new figure who took it upon himself to challenge contemporary societal norms. This would be demonstrated through a markedly confrontational approach to various issues dealt with in Gor'kij's early work. Thus, through the choice of a pen name which cried out for attention, a conscious physical appearance that closely identified him with the ordinary Russian, and his expression of their frustrations, Gor'kij began staging himself for posterity.

Gor'kij not only rejected his alleged *meščanin* origins by making *meščanstvo* one of his main targets of criticism, he also re-created the myth that he belonged to the working class through his ardent support of it in his fiction and in his political life. In addition, lack of documentation on the writer's early life has made it possible for his own narrative of his biography to go unchallenged. For example, while there is no tangible evidence of the existence of "Ja prišel v mir borot'sja", which is an unpublished work believed to have been the first short story Gor'kij wrote, it provides the credo for his life

and art in Soviet criticism. Of particular importance to Gor'kij's ability to determine his own image in Russian cultural life is his success at mixing life and art by acting out the lives of his major characters. His personal appearance and conduct seemed either to parallel or complement those of his heroes, especially in his early works.

Furthermore, the publication of Gor'kij's three-volume autobiography -- *Detstvo* (1913), *V ljudjax* (1916) and *Moi universitety* (1923), -- in which he used a clever mix of fact and fiction to stail the efforts of people who may have wanted to re-evaluate his origins, contributed significantly to the survival and intensification of his legend. It was natural to expect that as he occupied an increasingly important role in Russian letters, there would be a commensurate interest in knowing more about him. This is evidenced by the numerous biographical notes that preceded most commentaries on the young writer's work. These biographical notes increased annually both in number and volume, but failed to contribute anything significant by way of revealing Gor'kij's origins. This was because they were mainly a repetition of what was already known about the author. Meanwhile, the absence or sketchy nature of memoirs about Gor'kij from his contemporaries helped, albeit to a lesser degree, to leave the legend intact.

However, because of the pivotal nature of Gor'kij's role in Russian literature before and after 1917, a considerable body of criticism has become available about him. While many of the contributors to current scholarship favour one or the other position in their assessment of the man and writer, the controversy that pervades this material indicates that he was so important that nobody could remain indifferent to him in contemporary Russia. At one extreme, his admirers tend to magnify his achievements,

while his detractors, at the other extreme, are bent on discrediting him completely. The sometimes repetitive and diametrically opposed views expressed by Gor'kij's contemporaries about him and his role in the development of Russian literature and culture are not only a telling proof of the interest he generated among his contemporaries, but a confirmation of his role and importance.

Attempts to characterize Gor'kij's literary career have met with great difficulty, perhaps primarily because of his personal view of art. Gor'kij saw art as a function of life that could not be separated from it. He subordinated art to the pursuit of life and assigned to art the primary function of helping to raise consciousness among readers. In fact, such is the predominant and pervasive role of art in life for him that the blurry dichotomy of fact and fiction, of realism and romanticism became his hallmark.

If Gor'kij was consistent in his advice to younger writers on the importance of aesthetics in their work, he did not show it in his own oeuvre. He himself was a rather independent type and while he listened to the admonitions of Tolstoj, Čexov and Korolenko on ways to improve his art, he basically ignored their advice. Gor'kij not only constantly treated topical issues in his writings, he also sought to get his readers to debate them by focusing on ways to promote social change, on the future of Russian society, on Russian culture and the specific role of the intelligentsia in culture, as well as on current social changes. So encompassing and historically significant was the subject matter of his work that even his most ardent critics like Gippius came to acknowledge his importance, if only in terms of the issues with which he dealt. A certain consensus on Gor'kij's historical importance was probably best expressed by Blok when he argued, like Čexov,

that Gor'kij was larger than the texts he wrote.[15]

Two major approaches still dominate the assessment of Gor'kij's role in Russian literature. Both appear to have crystallized from the writer's initial reception among Russian critics in the 1890s. Gor'kij first came into contact with two groups on different sides of the literary spectrum. The members of *Severnyj vestnik* -- Akim Volynskij also known as A. Flekser (1863-1923), Merežkovskij, Gippius, Nikolaj Minskij (pseudonym of Nikolaj Maksimovič Vilenkin, 1856-1909), among others, who had published a few of Gor'kij's early stories, believed in and advocated the self-referential nature of literature and resented any attempts to subordinate it to life.

However, others like Korolenko and Mixajlovskij joined up with the Marxists in insisting that literature serve social and political functions. For example, Korolenko and Mixajlovskij not only avoided discussing the aesthetic elements of Gor'kij's work, they also helped a great deal to shape the revolutionary romantic aura that has come to surround his image today by emphasizing the socio-cultural aspects of his work. They did this through personal exchanges among themselves, when they tried to get his work published, as well as in their public critical remarks in response to the stories he wrote. It must be remembered that Korolenko was the first reviewer of Gor'kij's work and that his relationship with Mixajlovskij through *Russkoe bogatstvo*, the main organ of the *Narodniki* (sometimes referred to as Populists or *Šestidesjatniki*, Men of the Sixties), made it possible for the young writer to seek the advice of both men simultaneously.

While a small number of critics of Symbolist leanings, following the example of

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[15] Aleksandr Blok, "O realistax". *Zolotoe runo* 1907, 5: 63-72.

Blok and Andrej Belyj (Boris Nikolaevič Bugaev, 1880-1934), attempted a synthesis of the two positions, their approach soon waned. This left the two antagonistic positions to provide the main criteria by which Gor'kij is adjudicated in literary circles today. The survival of these two approaches can best be seen in the following explanation offered by Edith Clowes:

> The older view of the Gippius-Merežkovskij group, however, lasted longer and formed the basis for opinion about Gorky among émigré writers after the Revolution. Like Gippius (1908. 4), émigrés such as Nina Berberova (1967. 1) or Vladimir Nabokov (1981. 14) made it clear they did not recognize Gorky as a writer, although they admitted that as a cultural phenomenon and a personality he was interesting, even pivotal for the age.[16]

In addition to the difficulties mentioned above, which represent some of the stumbling blocks in arriving at a proper assessment of Gor'kij's place in Russian literature, Gippius highlighted yet another issue, which was important in assessing Gor'kij's image at that time. Writing under the title "Vybor meška" in her literary memoirs, Gippius pointed out that the fear of being branded either a liberal or a conservative prevented her from voicing her frank opinion on a current and important issue -- i.e., Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature. She expressed her frustration as follows: "Čto že mne delat'? Ja ne xoču v mešok, a meždu tem mne nužno kosnut'sja imenno odnogo iz takix volšebnyx imen, -- imeni Maksima Gor'kogo."[17] Her statement clearly epitomizes the difficulty Gor'kij's contemporaries encountered in their attempts

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[16] Clowes, 1987: XVIII.

[17] *Anton Krajnij (Zinaida Gippius). Literaturnij dnevnik (1899-1907)* (St. Petersburg: M.V. Pirožkov, 1908) 174.

at properly assessing his work at the early stages of his career. While it is uncertain to what extent this particular factor influenced the prevailing opinion of him, it is significant enough for one to argue that a more tolerant atmosphere could have contributed to providing less guarded opinions on his work.

To illustrate in more specific and compelling terms the difficulty experienced then and now in assessing Gor'kij's proper place in Russian literature, I have chosen to highlight the enormous inconsistencies revealed in some of the most candid assertions about his earlier works. This will provide a sense of the controversy that surrounded him even as his talent unfolded. The staunch support, mild appreciation and harsh denunciation of Gor'kij's work by different critics (and often by the same person as the years progressed) are not only clear proof of the difficulties experienced in judging his work then, but what is more, they provide the source of the problem confronting students interested in his place in and contribution to Russian literature today.

Chapter Two

The controversy over Gor'kij and his early success.

Commenting on the importance of Gor'kij in Russian literature,[18] Aleksandr Alekseevič Ninov rightly noted that with the appearance in 1898 of the writer's *Očerki i rasskazy*, he became a household name among the Russian reading public. Ninov attributed this sudden interest in Gor'kij partly to his unusually poetic biography. It would appear that the publication of Gor'kij's biography in a number of articles dealing with his initial stories went a long way to rouse interest in the young writer. After Tolstoj and Čexov, Gor'kij began to assume an increasingly significant role in Russian literature. While contemporary critics noted the presence of a breed of young writers in the shadow of these two giants of Russian literature at the turn of the century, particular attention was focused on Gor'kij, for he reminded many readers of them. Gor'kij did not only distinguish himself among his peers by his origin and excellent command of the Russian language, he also drew more attention than any of his colleagues. This was especially so because of both his choice and in-depth knowledge of the subjects he discussed.

Some of the earliest reviews of Gor'kij's work before 1900 came from Čexov, who, at the time was without doubt the leading writer of short stories in Russian literature -- a genre in which the young Gor'kij was particularly interested and productive. Ninov

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[18] A. Ninov, *M. Gor'kij i Iv. Bunin. Istorija otnošenij. Problemy tvorčestva: Monografija*. (Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1984) 560 pages.

recalled in his work that shortly after Čexov and Gor'kij met in Yalta in 1900, the latter sent his works to Čexov for assessment. This marked the beginning of a mutual friendship which lasted until Čexov's death in 1904. Prior to their first meeting, Čexov wrote in response to Gor'kij's questions about his works:

> Vy sprašivaete, kakogo ja mnenija o Vašix rasskazax. Kakogo mnenija? Talant nesomnennyj i pri tom nastojaščij, bol'šoj talant. Naprimer, v rasskaze "V stepi" on vyrazilsja s neobyknovennoj siloj, i menja daže zavist' vzjala, čto éto ne ja napisal. Vy xudožnik, umnyj čelovek. Vy čuvstvuete prevosxodno. Vy plastičny, t.e. kogda izobražaete ešč', to vidite ee i ošupyvaete rukami! Éto nastojaščee iskusstvo. Vot Vam moe mnenie, i ja očen' rad, i esli by my poznakomilis' i pogovorili čas drugoj, to Vy ubedilis' by, kak ja vysoko Vas cenju i kakie nadeždy vozlagaju na Vaši dorovanija.[19]

Čexov, at their first meeting, still regarded Gor'kij as a romantic figure and an autodidact originating from the depths of society. However, his opinion of Gor'kij as a talented person had taken root. What was probably not clear to him at the time was his fellow writer's involvement in the revolutionary movement. At the same time, Čexov's antipathy and aloofness to politics had been noticed by Gor'kij, who expressed admiration for the older man's position, while indicating his own inability to adopt such a stance. It must be noted that while both Čexov and Gor'kij hated banality and devoted a substantial amount of their time denouncing it, they expressed themselves differently. If Čexov used refined language, Gor'kij preferred to shock and shame his readers. This distinction remained a permanent trait of the two men even in their dealings with each other. It also explains why, despite the close bonds that later developed between Čexov and Gor'kij,

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[19] *M. Gor'kij i A. Čexov. Perepiska. Stat'i. Vyskazyvanija.* (Moscow: GIXL, 1951) 26.

their main difference lay in individual approaches to politics and social issues both in private and especially in their works.

On the literary front, Čexov is said to have pointed out a number of serious defects in the work of the younger writer. In particular, he drew attention to Gor'kij's tendency to exaggerate, especially his frequent use of hyperbole. Čexov advised Gor'kij to use short sentences, be straight to the point, and avoid colourful language which could detract from the focus of his stories.

Significantly, Tolstoj expressed similar reservations in a discussion of Gor'kij's work with Čexov. According to the latter, while Tolstoj praised Gorkij's talent and liked his "Jarmarka v Goltve" and "V stepi", he disliked "Mal'va" and pointed out that Gorkij's main mistake was that he tried to dream up human psychology. Tolstoj argued that this led to Gor'kij describing things that he had neither seen nor experienced. Tolstoj's disapproval of this approach can be explained by the fact that as a realist, he saw a writer's strength in his ability to describe things as they are, rather than as they should be and probably explains why he found it difficult to accept Gor'kij's brand of fiction.[20] Also, Tolstoj accused Gor'kij and contemporary Russian literature of disassociating themselves from the high moral problems with which Russian literature has always been preoccupied. At the same time, the novelist worried that he must have failed to understand Gor'kij because of his age. It was perhaps this nagging worry that led Tolstoj to write to Gor'kij soon after their first meeting to say he liked the author more

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[20] *M. Gor'kij i A. Čexov. Perepiska. Stat'i. Vyskazyvanija.* (Moscow: GIXL, 1951) 37-38.

than his writing.[21]

The view that Gor'kij had a tendency to hyperbolize probably tended to be repeated among his contemporaries because it originated in the initial reactions to him of Russia's most important writers of the time. Even today, this notion enjoys such validity that there are critics who refuse to consider the writer's early works because of their primarily romantic nature, which they see as a falsification of reality. Yet, it is probably true to say that no one understood the idealist side of Gor'kij's work better than Gor'kij himself. For example, he insisted on the necessity to maintain a dream of a bright future in order to get through the ordeals of the present.

Gor'kij's ever-present optimism about the future seemed to have carried over into his fiction and certainly accounts for what is often described as his romanticism, especially in the early stages of his career. Thus, while Gor'kij respected Čexov as a master of form, he rejected what he regarded as a meek and condescending approach to reality by the older man. Gor'kij refused to sympathize with Čexov's melancholic characters, and instead, emphasized the joy of living. Nevertheless, the two appeared to complement each other in their denunciation of Russian dreariness.

To understand Gor'kij's "non-realist" approach and its early success with both contemporary readers and critics, one has to look for explanations beyond literature. If his image as a socially engaged writer were to carry weight, it was natural that extra-literary considerations would come into play to explain his particular approach. The

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[21] Čexov's account of Tolstoj's reaction to *Foma Gordeev* and "Jamarka v Goltve" are corroborated by V. Posse, who was present at Gor'kij's first meeting with Tolstoj in 1900. See: *Na temy zizni*, (St. Petersburg: Vestnik Znanija, 1909).

timing of Gor'kij's appearance on the Russian literary scene coincided with "special" responsibility both for Russian writers, in general, and Gorkij, in particular. At a time when both Tolstoj and Čexov were running out of new ideas, the need for a new voice in the grand tradition of the Russian classics became increasingly pressing. Moreover, Russian literature in the second half of the nineteenth century was gradually beginning to include in its repertoire an in-depth, non-stereotypical examination of the peasant who had been too long neglected. It was, after all, the peasant, who represented the silent majority of the Russian population; and while Gor'kij was not alone in highlighting the peasantry, his efforts provoked the most response.

Since the 1860s, the group commonly known in Russian cultural history as *Šestidesjatniki* had advocated a philosophy in which the Russian peasant became the main focus. As the reforms of 1861 did not satisfy opponents of the czarist regime, they embarked on a plan to provide the Russian people with basic education to make them more receptive to impending changes. Though the movement was largely unsuccessful in bringing about rapid change, it held enough sway in the minds of intellectuals to experience a resurgence in the 1880s. Writers like Korolenko, Mamin-Sibirjak (Dmitrij Narkisovič Mamin, 1852-1912) and Gleb Ivanovič Uspenskij (1843-1902) were some of the movement's most notable exponents. Their work dealt, primarily, with the peasant question.

However, the peasant as a literary figure was not entirely the monopoly of the *Narodniki*. A rampant subject of Russian sentimentalist and realistic novels from Karamzin to Korolenko, many of Gor'kij's contemporaries, including both Tolstoj and

Čexov, dealt with the same question, albeit, from different perspectives. Growing interest in the lives of the vast majority of Russians coincided with Gor'kij's arrival on the literary scene and gave a certain impetus to his career. Because of his relatively humble origins, his social position conferred on him a peculiar right and responsibility to deal with issues relating directly to ordinary people. Thus for the first time, a spokesperson for the people arose from within their ranks.

The effect of this development was two-fold. Firstly, it signalled a growing interest in what was still fertile ground for Russian literature. Secondly, it also marked the shift away from the period in which people outside this "class" surmised or, at best, observed the lives of ordinary people through privileged eyes. Expectations that Gor'kij was a true representative of the people and spoke on their behalf were confirmed following the success of the publication of the first volume of his collected works in 1898. The result of this was that attention turned very quickly to him.

The focus on Gor'kij as a representative of ordinary people, especially those on the margins of society, can be observed in Ninov's account of a theatre festival held in Yalta in honour of Čexov in 1900. The occasion provided a veritable celebration of Russian art, bringing together a great number of contemporary Russian artists. Ninov observed that although the event was dedicated to Čexov and half of the performances were of his plays, Bunin, who was present at the event, reported that all the participants felt the importance of the new name and talent that was beginning to take centre stage in Russian literature. According to Ninov, Bunin pointed out that the literary community began to look at Gor'kij as an embodiment of the rising current that took shape during

the last decade of the nineteenth century. To this end Ninov wrote: "Vse v Rossii postepenno prixodilo v dviženie, vse vyzvalo k aktivnosti, i proizvedenija Gor'kogo v naibol'šej mere otvečali étomu gospodstvjuščemu umonastroeniju époxi."[22]

The impression Gor'kij made on participants of the Yalta meeting was so enormous that the veteran actor and founder of the Moskovskij Xudožestvennyj Akademičeskij Teatr (MXAT), Konstantin Sergeevič Stanislavskij (1863-1938), devoted substantial time and space in his reminiscences about Čexov to describe the effect of Gor'kij's presence on him at this meeting. He considered the young writer the source of a new realistic type of drama that would help interpret contemporary reality, and also looked to him to assist MXAT in revamping its fortunes. Stanislavskij observed this about Gor'kij's presence in Yalta:

> Dlja menja, centrom javilsja Gor'kij, kotoryj srazu zaxvatil menja svoim obojaniem, ego neobyknovennoj figuroj, lice, vygovore na "o", neobyknovennoj žestikuljacii, pokazyvanie kulaka v minutu ékstaza, v svetloj, detskoj ulybke, v kakom-to vremenami tragičeski proniknovennom lice, v smešnoj ili sil'noj, krasočnoj, obraznoj reči skvozili kakaja-to duševnaja mjagkost' i gracija, i nesmotrja na ego sutulovatuju figuru, v nej byla svoeobraznaja plastika i vneščnaja krasota. Ja často lovil sebja na tom, čto lubjujus' ego pozoj ili žestom.[23]

It must be noted, however, that while Stanislavskij's impressions of Gor'kij conform with the general opinions expressed about the writer at the turn of the century, they cannot be taken at face value. This is so because they were written much later, probably in chorus with those who lionized Gor'kij, and ran the danger of loss of

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[22] Ninov, 1984: 393.

[23] *Čexov v vospominanijax sovremennikov*. (Moscow: 1952) 322.

immediacy and sincerity.

Further testimony to Gor'kij's popularity with the public and his standing among his contemporaries can be observed from Bunin's impressions of the writer at their initial meeting. Recalling the meeting later, Bunin noted:

> Ko vremeni pervoj moej vstreči s nim, slava ego šla po vsej Rossii. Potom ona prodolžala tol'ko rasti. Russkaja intelligentsia sxodila ot nego s uma, i ponjatno počemu. Malo togo, čto éto byla pora uže bol'šogo pod'ema russkoj revoljucionnosti: v tu poru šla ešče strašnaja bor'ba meždu "narodnikami" i nedavno pojavivšimisja marksistami, a Gor'kij vospeval Čelkašej. On často pojavljalsja v Moskve, v Krymu, rukovodil žurnalom "Novaja žizn'", načinal izdatel'stvo "Znanie".[24]

Already in the 1890s, Gor'kij was at the peak of his fame which probably explains why so much attention was focused on him in Yalta. Yet, it is also important to note that even at the height of the writer's glory, there was never unanimous opinion on the nature of his talent. Around 1900 the debate about him had become so intense that a very large number of his contemporaries had something to say about him. As a sample of this debate, I have chosen to focus on the exchange between I. Bunin and Nikolaj Dmitrievič Telešov (1867-1957), who discussed the subject in their correspondence.

In reaction to a letter of July 21, 1900 from Telešov, in which he wrote that he had bought himself a copy of Gor'kij's first collection of stories *Očerki i rasskazy*, Bunin informed Telešov that his attempts to sell the writer to the peasants (among whom he lived at the time) were unsuccessful. More importantly, Bunin specified the reaction of his brother, Evgenij to Gor'kij's fame. According to him, the latter refused to come under

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[24] "Bunin i Gor'kij. Otryvki iz vospominanij." *Don*: 1968, 3: 169.

Gor'kij's influence, pointing out that while he considered him talented, he found him insufferable because his work was unreal and his style exaggerated.

As would be seen later, it was clear that while Bunin was willing to give Gor'kij his due by accepting him as a talented writer, there were already signs of the many serious disagreements which later characterized the relationship between the two men. Telešov discerned in Bunin's letter a hidden hostility toward Gor'kij and wrote back to him: "Čego ty zlišsja? Gor'kij kak ni tolkuj, vse-taki xoroš. Xotja ja i načal čitat' po tvoemu velen'ju Čirikova *Imeninnicu*, no Čirikovu do Gor'kogo daleko."[25]

As one would expect, Bunin denied any ill feeling against Gor'kij. What is important though in this exchange is that as early as 1900, Bunin had expressed opinions, however private, that Gor'kij owed his renown and popularity more to critics and the reading public than to his talent. Later, after the Revolution of 1917, when Bunin found himself in exile, and separated from a homeland about whose fate he had taken position on opposite sides to Gor'kij, he made public his severe criticism of Gor'kij, which essentially repeated what he had intimated much earlier in his private correspondence with Telešov.

In that conflict, which ultimately led to Gor'kij's publication, without the author's permission,[26] of about fifty letters written to him by Bunin, the latter presented a stunning indictment of his once close ally. Bunin attributed Gor'kij's literary fame to an

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[25] Ninov, 1984: 393.

[26] The publication of Bunin's letters to Gor'kij without Bunin's permission played a significant role in his decision to have all his earlier letters burnt. This, Bunin claimed, was because they did not reflect his genuine feelings.

"uncultured" public and overly enthusiastic critics. But as an examination of the world views of the two men would show, Bunin's disagreement with the public and the critics over Gor'kij's fame indicated, more than anything else, a fundamental opposition in perspective on literary creation. Like Vladislav Felicianovič Xodasevič (1886-1939), who later left an oft-referred-to memoir on Gor'kij, Bunin was a private poet in search of his own other worlds, while Gor'kij was a proletarian writer with a dream of transforming our common world.

Clearly, Bunin refused to accept the then rather widespread approach which dragged contemporary Russian reality into Russian literature. Instead, he preferred to stand isolated and not submit to what he considered an erroneous path. In whatever way one chooses to regard Bunin's conflicting assessments of Gor'kij, this example is symptomatic of contemporary critical opinion. For example, while Čexov in apparent reference to Gor'kij's interference with his characters in his stories compared Gor'kij to a restless member of a theatre audience, his mentor, first reader and critic Korolenko felt otherwise, at least, regarding "Čelkaš" (1895), when he wrote the following in response to the younger man's request for his opinion of the story:

> -- Vy napisali nedurnuju veščʼ. Daže prjamo-taki xorošij rasskaz! Iz celogo kuska sdelano...<...>. Vy možete sozdavatʼ xaraktery, ljudi govorjat i dejstvujut u vas ot sebja, ot vsej suščnosti, vy umeete ne vmešivatʼsja v tečenie ix mysli, igru čuvst, éto ne kazdomu daetsja! A samoe xorošee v étom to, čto cenite čeloveka takim kakov on estʼ.[27]

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[27] *A.M. Gorʼkij i V.G. Korolenko. Perepiska. Statʼi. Vyskazivanija.* (Moscow: GIXL, 1957) 169.

The initial reactions of Korolenko and Čexov cited above are an example of the diametrically opposing views the two held on Gor'kij's relationship with his characters. From what we know about the two men, the conflict arising from their judgement of Gor'kij must have been a result of their individual views on an author's relationship to character depiction.

Regarding the relevance of Tolstoj's remarks about exaggerations in the psychology of Gor'kij's characters, Mixajlovskij, the editor of *Russkoe bogatstvo*, had, as early as 1895, expressed similar reservations when Korolenko sought his help to publish *Čelkaš*. Mixajlovskij upheld the main idea in the story, but expressed doubt in the truthfulness of the main protagonist, who appeared to him to reason beyond his level of intelligence. The veteran critic pointed out that the story suffered from abstractions and indicated that while he was willing to accept the abstractness of Čelkas, he was not inclined to see Gavrila in the same light.

Here again, as in the conflicting judgements of Korolenko and Čexov, it is not completely clear, except for reasons of personal positions, why Tolstoj and Mixajlovskij had similar views regarding Gor'kij's treatment of his heroes. However, one is tempted to see in the identical nature of their assessments a certain sympathy toward the peasant and his position from a religious and a sociological perspective, respectively. Both positions are dealt with negatively by Gor'kij in most of his earlier stories and more specifically in *Čelkas*. In fact, Mixajlovskij's negative attitude toward Gor'kij became even more evident as he and Korolenko discussed Gor'kij's work pursuant to Korolenko's attempts to persuade Mixajlovskij to carry them in *Russkoe bogatstvo*. Mixajlovskij's trust

in the potential of the peasant and his work as a *Narodnik* explain his sympathy towards Gavrila and his subsequent refusal to accept Gor'kij's depiction of his protagonist.

Most commentators on Gor'kij's rise to literary fame have, by and large, accepted and supported the idea that he was catapulted into the limelight, "without a fight", especially through his association with Korolenko. Nevertheless, Korolenko has denied the idea that he made a writer out of Gor'kij. Several letters exchanged between the two indicate that the route to fame was not always an easy one as Gor'kij came up against people he perceived to be obstacles. An example of the kind of treatment to which he was subjected is evidenced in Korolenko's letter to Gor'kij of April 15, 1895 in which he explained on behalf of Mixaijlovskij, why "Ošibka" was not accepted for publication in *Russkoe bogatstvo*. In it, Korolenko stated that the rejection of the story did not surprise him, given the views of its editor on *mučitel'nost'* ("cruelty"). He pointed out that Mixaijlovskij was so sensitive to the subject that he was unable to forgive even Dostoevskij, whom he called "*žestokij talant*", for the cruelty of his work. In short, Korolenko reassured Gor'kij that in his opinion "Ošibka" was well written and was rejected only because it did not coincide with Mixajlovskij's perception of the literary art that should appear in *Russkoe bogatstvo*.

A follow-up letter clarified even better Mixajlovskij's attitude toward Gor'kij. In it, Korolenko assured Gor'kij that "Čelkaš" would appear the same year in the June edition of *Russkoe bogatstvo*. Explaining why he thought Mixajlovskij received "Ošibka" negatively, Korolenko cited Mixajlovskij: ""Avtor nesomnenno talantliv, -- sila est', no

v pustom prostranstve razmaxivat' rukami, xotja by i sil'nymi, -- net smysla."[28] To this, Korolenko added: "on (Mixajlovskij) vyražaet želanie, čtoby Vy izbavilis' ot nekotoroj iskusstvennosti, rastjanutosti i "priznakov dekadentstva" (kak v "More" i "Ošibka").[29] As if to underline the strength and veracity of this observation, Korolenko emphasized: "Takov otvet Mixajlovskogo, vsegda neskol'ko rezok, no v nem mnogo pravdy."[30] Further to this, Korolenko devoted the remainder of the letter to attacks made by Gor'kij against Mixajlovskij in an article in *Očerki i nabroski*, which appeared in the *Samarskaja gazeta* of April 18, 1895 entitled "Kak ssorjatsja velikie ljudi". In it, Gor'kij dealt with an article Mixajlovskij had written about Nikolaj Alekseevič Nekrasov (1821-1877). It is clear from Korolenko's comments that Gor'kij did not have his facts right and most likely used the article to get back at Mixajlovskij for refusing to publish his work.

Korolenko's involvement in Gor'kij's career can be observed as early as 1894, when in an October 4 letter to Mixail Alekseevič Sablin (1842-1898), publisher and then editor of *Russkie vedomosti*, he made a pitch to convince the latter to consider publishing "Staruxa Izergil'" in his paper. He appealed to Sablin to consider the story on its own merits and warned that negative impressions made by an earlier Gor'kij manuscript should not be allowed to prejudice his decision. In the same letter, Korolenko stressed that: "On pišet očen' nerovno, to nelepo, to očen' i očen' nedurno. Voobše -- zasluživaet polnogo

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[28] *A.M. Gor'kij i V.G. Korolenko.* 1957: 169.

[29] Ibid., 35.

[30] *A.M. Gor'kij i V.G. Korolenko.* 1957: 35.

vnimanija."[31] The older writer's continued support is seen a month later (Nov. 4, 1894) in another letter, in which he reminded the editors of *Russkie vedomosti* about his personal conversations with them regarding "Staruxa Izergil". While Korolenko exhorted the editors to give him a final word on the fate of the story, he also reminded them of Gor'kij's potential and the need for critics and publishing houses to support young and talented writers.

In order to put into perspective Korolenko's contribution towards the career of the younger writer, one must look at some background information about Korolenko. Since he was not a professional critic and did not leave any consolidated statements on his views on literature, researchers interested in his opinions have had to pore through various documents to make their deductions. In general, the main sources used by critics include entries in his diary of the late 1880s, correspondence with writers, newspaper and journal editors, his choices of stories for publication in the journals where he worked with or on which he had influence and the counsel he gave to younger writers, who looked to him for guidance and publication help. An even more important source is Korolenko's own literary practice in his fiction.

By the time Gor'kij appeared on the literary map of Russia, it had become obvious to Korolenko that Russian literature had exhausted realism and the civil theme (*graždanstvennost'*) that went hand in hand with it. In leading critical circles, the need for a new aesthetic and new approach became more and more urgent. Like Merežkovskij in his famous critical review of Russian literature in 1892, Korolenko, one of the guardians

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[31] V.G. Korolenko, *Sobranie sočinenii v desjati tomax.* (Moscow: 1956) 10: 227.

of Russian literature at the turn of the century, realized that it had come to a standstill. Increasingly, Russian literature had to look to the past rather than the future to maintain its prestige. Korolenko favoured a revivalist option that would maintain the nineteenth century tradition of democratic principles supplemented by more recent populist ones. This would be flavoured with a certain romanticism aimed at giving meaning to life. It is probably herein that lie the roots of what would later be called "romantic realism," a possible antecedent of Socialist Realism.

In hindsight, Korolenko's approach to literature would tend to include the little details of life present in the works of Čexov, accompanied by the heroism of Gor'kij's characters. Korolenko was unwilling to separate the mass of the Russian people from their leaders -- the *raznočintsy* -- who came from among them. Consequently, he sought to carve out a literary programme that would accommodate both the individual and the crowd so that they would depend on and support each other. It is in this light that he saw the new literature that would replace nineteenth-century Russian realism. This literature would reveal the meaning and identity of the individual against the background of the mass of the Russian people.

Korolenko's proposed synthesis coincided with, and to a large extent, represented the views of Mixajlovskij and *Russkoe bogatstvo*. The joint efforts of the two literary veterans supported a literature oriented towards real-life experiences as distinct from the more abstract and otherworldly approach favoured and advocated by competing groups like the Symbolists. It was in the light of the above that the first person narrator and autobiographical works attracted Korolenko's particular attention. Similarly, it is in this

light that his enthusiasm in encouraging younger writers, whose life story represented a totally new experience for the reading public, should be viewed.

An important point for Gor'kij's career at the close of the nineteenth century was his mentor's willingness to attribute a significant role to didactism in the new literature. Korolenko saw the need for Russian literature to maintain its traditional role of defending the poor, while teaching civic duties following the traditional examples set by Nikolaj Vasil'evič Gogol' (1802-1852) and Nekrasov. In his opinion, merely reflecting the conditions of life was insufficient for the new literature since the reality of Russian life demanded more authorial initiative in responding to the needs of the time. Korolenko's literary recipe appears clearly in his diary entry of March 1888 which reads:

> Iskusstvo, kotoroe v takuju poru tol'ko otrazit obščie unynie, otčajanie i bezverie, budet tol'ko ego zerkalom -- izmenit svoej svjatoj i vysokoj celi. Net, v tolpe, kotoroe b'etsja vo t'me i xolode, najdutsja ljudi, kotoryx vospriimčivost' k svetu solnca i dnja byla bol'še, kotoryx voobraženie bodree i zdorovee, v krovi kotoryx dol'še igraet sijanie dnja. Oni napomnjat o bleske solnca, o sineve neba, o tom, čto uže mnogo raz byla t'ma i opjat' sijal svet. Oni skažut éto ne odnimi suximi dokazatel'stvami, -- v ix slovax zaverkajut dejstvitel'no blesk i sijanie, kotoroe uvidjat i v ix tvorenijax, i poveržat, i vzdoxnut bodree, i skoree vyjdut na svet.[32]

Korolenko's vision of art provided the ground rules for the kind of literature that would demand of the writer not only to criticize the established order, but also to endeavour to present positive ideals and possibly positive heroes. Korolenko stressed that literature should be able to aid Man in his movement from the past into the future. It is with this objective in mind that the struggle for an ideal became the driving force of his

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[32] E. Mel'nikova, ed. *V.G. Korolenko o literature*, (Moscow: GIXL, 1957) 424-425.

own art.

While it is probable that Korolenko did not anticipate Gor'kij's quick rise to literary fame, he must have sensed from the very first time the two met that somewhere in this young man lay the synthesis of realism and romanticism with which he sought to replace the overbearing populism of the second half of the nineteenth century. He must have had his first taste of this mixture of realism and renewed romanticism in two of Gor'kij's earliest stories, which have survived as vital parts of Gor'kij's legacy to this day. Korolenko is said to have pointed out elements of these two trends in "Staruxa Izergil'" and "Čelkas", which were both published with his direct help.

Yet, in the partnership between realism and romanticism, the veteran writer preferred to see the former remain a dominant element. In his plan, the romantic element would give some potency to realistic literature, in other words, provide something for which to live. It was probably against this background that he realized that the romantic elements of Gor'kij's legends and the practical experiences the budding writer accumulated during his travels through Russia could arouse the interest of the reading public.

Among his immediate predecessors, Gor'kij probably owes no one more than Korolenko for his plot line, characters and themes. Yet, it becomes clear from a study of the works of the two authors that their narrators have substantially different objectives in their association with the wandering people at the margins of society. To all intents and purposes, the differences in objectives go a long way to explain why considerably more attention was paid to the works of the younger writer.

While proof of affinities between Gor'kij and Korolenko is less difficult to find, both men appear to have facilitated the opinion popular among Soviet commentators on Gor'kij's work that the founder of Socialist realism owed little to other writers, including Korolenko himself. Deliberately or inadvertently, statements made by Korolenko, especially, in his correspondence with younger writers, who looked up to him for guidance and support, seem to distance him from Gor'kij. For example, in response to what he considered a misconception, prevalent at the time, that he had "made" a writer out of Gor'kij, Korolenko wrote to Leonid N. Parijskij (dates n.a.) in a letter dated June 6, 1910:

> ...Ošibočno dumat', čto kto-nibud' mog "sdelat'" pisatelja Gor'kogo. On prišel ko mne s gotovoj rukopis'ju. Pervaja byla ne vpolne udačna, no vidna byla svoeobraznaja sila. V sledujuščix ona razvertyvalas'. Ko mne prinosili sotni, vernee tysjači rukopisej, no mnogo Gor'kix iz nix, nesmotrja na moi ukazanija, -- ne proizošlo.[33]

Similarly, in a letter of December 2, 1916, recorded in the same source, Korolenko delivered an even stronger message of similar import to Terentij Nikolaevič Galapura (dates n.a.), another aspiring writer in which he noted:

> Mnogie sčitajut, čto blagodarja moemu pokrovitel'stvu Gor'kij stal pisatelem. *Éto basnja. On stal pisatelem blagodarja bol'šomu talantu. Ja tol'ko pročityval (da i to ne vse) ego pervye rasskazy i stixotvorenija i govoril svoe mnenie.* (S.M.) Éto že ja delaju dlja mnogix, gotov sdelat' i dlja Vas, esli opjat' prišlete...[34]

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[33] *V.G. Korolenko o literature*, 1957: 569-570.

[34] Ibid., 614.

By making light of widely held suggestions crediting him with Gor'kij's success, and stressing emphatically the importance of Gor'kij's talent for his literary success, Korolenko effectively deflected attention from himself and from whatever contribution he had made towards the career of the younger writer.

The effects of such a denial were two-fold. Firstly, they shifted emphasis to Gor'kij's talent, and secondly, and even more importantly, they allowed the author to distance himself from Korolenko while creating a personal legend. Possible proof of this process can be seen in Gor'kij's growing interest in drama around this time and in his closer ties and identification with Čexov, who was by far a better known writer than Korolenko. This certainly was a wise and subtle attempt on the part of Gor'kij to move away from his earlier mentor while forging ties with the most potent force in Russian literature at the time. On a more practical level, unlike Korolenko who preferred to turn attention from himself and the author-narrator to his literary characters, Gor'kij consciously created a literary persona of himself through the role of Maksim the narrator. To enhance his literary image, Gor'kij carefully and deliberately chose his literary genres, his clothes and even his personal behaviour in public with a view to producing a desired effect.

Although it can be argued with substantial credibility that Gor'kij's approach to literature at the beginning of his career did not exactly conform with the Mixajlovskij-Korolenko model, which advocated the fulfilment of the individual in the context of the collective, there is no doubt that he was exposed to their influence. There is proof that, even if he had not done so in his earlier works, Gor'kij had found a way

to deal favourably with the individual and the crowd by the first decade of the twentieth century. Under the circumstances, it is probably right to see any difference in approach between Gor'kij and Korolenko, as a result of other influences, notably the individualistic philosophy of Nietzsche, whose ideas were making their way into Russia in the 1880s and 1890s.

Researchers now attribute a great deal of the rapid success Gor'kij enjoyed to other influences, including his relationship to other writers. This has been particularly true with respect to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose ideas were prominent across Europe at the turn of the century. Nietzsche seemed to have occupied Gor'kij's attention, especially in the early part of his career. To pinpoint Nietzschean influences on Gor'kij, critics have tended to compare his work with the main points of Nietzsche's philosophy. To this end, particular consideration is given to the period in which Gor'kij's works were written and how much information was available to Gor'kij both through the propagation of the German philosopher's ideas and translations of his work into Russian. Information pieced together by researchers not only shows that Gor'kij was familiar with the general tenets of Nietzsche's philosophy, but there is also ample evidence that he knew some of his works through Russian translations.[35]

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[35] Edith Clowes speaks of Gor'kij's familiarity with the works of Nietzsche. In particular, she points to the contributory role of N. Minskij, V. Preobraženskij and several other contemporary Russian literary figures in the propagation of Nietzsche's ideas in Russia. Similarly, the Russian translations of Nietzsche's work by a certain A.B. Vasil'ev, who was friends with Gor'kij are especially relevant here. See: Edith W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness*. (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois U.P., 1988) 43-82.

As for suggestions of early Marxist influence on Gor'kij, there is hardly any evidence available to us except in the writer's own memoirs about his mentor entitled *V. G. Korolenko* (1922). However, this was written at a time when Gor'kij found it necessary to provide evidence of ideological acceptability to the regime in Moscow. Finally, attention must be drawn to the fact that while the glorification of the individual was more pronounced in Gor'kij's earlier works, the subject was not alien to Korolenko himself. It remained, in fact, an integral part of the Populist agenda, which contended that gifted individuals were destined to lead the rest of humanity to fulfilment.

Undoubtedly, Korolenko's efforts in support of Gor'kij's rise to literary fame go beyond what has just been described, and there are even unsubstantiated suspicions that the older writer must have suppressed information which, while not profoundly damaging to Gor'kij's image, could have detracted from it. From what appeared later to be an obvious case of *grooming* by two experienced older men, who combined elements of the classical Russian tradition (Mixajlovskij) and a more recent populist and socially engaged trend (Korolenko), Gor'kij was able, with the additional help of Posse (his publisher), to select 30 stories which were published as *Očerki i rasskazy*. This collection assured his rapid rise to fame and it, together with a consciously cultivated physical outlook, paved his way to national and international success.

As one would expect, Gor'kij's popularity, however rapid, did not owe itself entirely to historical and social changes prevalent in Russia at the time he wrote. While these factors can by no means be ignored, the author's success lay at least partly in his being able to take advantage of the times and use his talent to make a successful literary

career. Thus, one can well argue that works by contemporaries like Korolenko and Karonin (Nikolaj Elpidiforovič Petropavlovskij, 1853-1892) contributed significantly to forging a midway alliance between the *bosjak* and the "*intelligent*-narrator" by making them recognize the common concerns that unite them. These factors were indispensable to Gor'kij's treatment of the *bosjak* theme. Indeed, credit must be given to him for going beyond his predecessors and contemporaries alike.

At the same time, it must be remembered that if Korolenko and others succeeded in dragging the *bosjak* out of the abyss and the fringes of society to a place where he began to be regarded as human, it was Gor'kij who unreservedly identified himself with these "subhumans". By so doing, he allowed the once despised "čelovekopodobnye golye sub'ekty" of Karonin and others not only to attain human status in his work, but even to assume a certain superiority over the rest of society. From "sub"ekt" Gor'kij's *bosjak* graduated to "čelovek" and began to take on more grandiose characteristics that would later elevate him to the status of "čelovek bol'šoj bukvy" (the superman).

The existence of a group of stories in Russian literature in the 1890s dedicated to the exploration of the relationship between the individual and the crowd has to be taken into consideration in order to put Gor'kij's treatment of the subject into perspective. Writers such as Korolenko, Vsevolod Mixajlovič Garšin (1855-1888), Semen Jakovlevič Nadson (1862-1887) and the populist critic Mixajlovskij all dealt with the subject at various times and, indeed, it had been prominent in Russian literature at least since Aleksandr Sergeevič Puškin (1799-1837). While it would appear that the fiction of Korolenko, Garšin and Nadson would be of more immediate interest as literary

antecedents to Gor'kij's work, the popularization of the theme of the individual and the crowd in a number of major articles by Mixajlovskij in the second half of the nineteenth century is of no less significance for his career. This is particularly so when one considers Gor'kij's changing attitude toward this subject as the years went by.

While Gor'kij gave priority to the individual over the crowd in his early stories ("Makar Čudra" -- 1892), the emphasis in later years, especially after 1900 seemed to shift toward altruism. His knowledge of Mixajlovskij's works on the subject would appear to have played a role in such a shift. In chapter IX of her 1983 dissertation on the early works of M. Gor'kij, Betty Y. Forman devotes a subsection to the role of Thomas Carlyle and the adaptations of his work made by Mixajlovskij and their presumed impact on the question of the individual and the crowd in Russian literature. She writes that in six lectures delivered by Carlyle in which he explored the hero as divinity, as prophet, as poet, as priest, as a man of letters and as king, the Englishman's main idea is "the overwhelming and determining significance of the great man in history." (p. 506). While she observes that Carlyle's main argument is supported by the overwhelming credit that he gives to the individual as against the crowd, she also pointed out that he concedes that "the hero may sacrifice himself to the needs of others as he construes them..." (p. 507). In the context of Russian literature this last point is of particular significance for both Mixajlovskij and Gor'kij. The case of Danko in "Staruxa Izergil'", though isolated in the early works of Gor'kij, falls completely in line with this notion and is possibly an indication of the altruistic role he would require of strong individuals later in his fiction.

While trying to justify the importance of the individual in a series of articles that included Carlyle's ideas and those of other current theories on the individual and the crowd, Mixajlovskij sought a way to shift Carlyle's emphasis on the individual to the relationship between the individual and the masses. Unlike Carlyle, who emphasized the extraordinary nature of the hero, Mixajlovskij regards charisma, which he describes as the ability to get the crowd to do the things that the leader desires, as the central point.

From a purely literary perspective, and in terms of specific genres that were developed in Russia at the time and as a subject for the study of Mixajlovskij's construable influence on Gor'kij when Gor'kij emerged, Mixajlovskij's *Ešče o gerojax* (1891) is the most significant among his four articles. In it Mixajlovskij emphasizes the conscious imitation of the lives of great people and gives a special role to autobiography as a literary genre that should be encouraged and read. It is this course of action that he advocated to the reading public as editor of the influential magazine *Russkoe bogatstvo*. It is not surprising, therefore, that while Gor'kij's attitude towards the hero gradually turned more positive as he matured, he looks at the crowd in most cases with suspicion, treating it, at best, passively. Several of his stories not only reveal the crowd as passive, but almost always portray it negatively when it is involved in anything. All in all, one may conclude that Gor'kij largely owes his treatment of the individual and the crowd to Mixajlovskij's views on the subject.

Judging from the above, one can argue with a high degree of probability that the growing importance of the author-narrator personality in the work of both Korolenko and Gor'kij in the last decades of the nineteenth century was a result of Mixajlovskij's

influence. More significantly, the similarity of approach to the Russian peasantry -- one of suspicion and distrust -- by both Mixajlovskij and Gor'kij should not be underestimated when considering the relationship between the two literary personalities.

The value of what has been discussed so far, especially to Gor'kij, lies in his ability to combine the major trends of the period as manifested in the works and views of leading writers and critics like Korolenko and Mixajlovskij. However, Gor'kij also represented a new trend in its own right, notably, the birth of a new type of writer with roots among ordinary people. This was very much unlike his predecessors, who reflected, primarily among the aristocrats and *intelligentsia*, the interest of their constituents.

Furthermore, Gor'kij was also able to maintain and, in some cases, extend the boundaries of traditional classical Russian literature. Gor'kij started where the great writers of Russian literature left off. In contrast to the pathetic and ineffectual characters of the preceding epoch, he created fearless, uncompromising characters, who took it upon themselves to lead their countrymen in the struggle for a brighter future. He maintained a strong faith in man, believing that a person might rise to boundless heights. His ability to respond to the needs and interests of major sectors of the Russian population, ranging from the ordinary people to the Populists to representations of the Conservatives gave him and his work a particular appeal. Moreover, the struggle among different social and ideological groups to claim him as their own contributed enormously to enhancing his popularity among his contemporaries. The abundance of early positive opinion on his work not only affected subsequent reviews in later years, it also tended to crystallize a positive image in the minds of a majority of his readers, particularly among those who

regarded him as their own.

Finally, in trying to explain why Gor'kij succeeded where others, particularly his predecessors, failed, one must take into consideration several factors. These would include the changing attitude of Russian readers towards individual writers as in the case of Garšin and Nadson who laid the foundations for a more personalized relationship between the author and the reader, and, above all, the emergence and even crystallization at the turn of the last century of new and vibrant modernist trends in the literary process. Significant changes in contemporary literature were depriving realism of its hegemony and allowing writers more room for experimentation than in the preceding period. Modernist trends such as Impressionism, Expressionism and Symbolism succeeded in widening the literary-thematic and genre scope of the emerging century.

Also at the same time there was a democratization of the literary process which led to a corresponding increase in readership.[36] This, coupled with the ensuing widening of the thematic scope played a major role in the recognition of end-of-the-century writers like Gor'kij. In this regard, it must be remembered that Gor'kij's fame in the West, for example, depended to a large extent on the success of his dramatic works being termed avantgarde and naturalistic. Their performances by MXAT, especially *Na dne*, were consistent with the experimental mood of its founders (Vladimir Ivanovič

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[36] Boris Ejxenbaum argued in "Pisatel'skij oblik M. Gor'kogo" which appeared in his work *Moj vremennik* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Pisatelej, 1929) 115-20 that, the appearance of Gor'kij in the early 1890s represented a "literary fact" which symbolized the broadening of the literary process in that period. He also claimed that Gor'kij's literary-social personality gained more attention than the aesthetic quality of his work because of the demand among readers for sensation and attention to the lives of literary celebrities.

Nemirovič-Dančenko (1858-1943), and Stanislavskij) and furthermore the existence of Naturalism as a literary alternative in the West at this time favoured Gor'kij and made it possible for him to succeed where other writers before him had failed.

Chapter Three

Collecting Gor'kij's work for publication: The first three volumes.

Before embarking on an analysis of the works of critics, whose early views helped to formulate contemporary opinion about Gor'kij as a writer, it is important to mention that the bulk of their comments on him centred on the first three volumes of his work. In order to better understand the context of these stories as well as the intent of the writer in these volumes, it is significant to examine their background, bearing in mind that there were few accidental elements in the general development and direction of Gor'kij's career, for he and his publishers were always aware of the path they pursued and, most importantly, the impression they intended to create on his readers.

I would like to begin with a word or two on the type and approach of the journals and newspapers which published Gor'kij's work. It will be recalled from Merežkovskij's *O pričinax upadka i o novyx tečenijax sovremennoj russkoj literatury*, given first as a lecture in 1892 and later published in 1893, that literary publications went through various phases at the time. First, promising writers published stories and reports in provincial newspapers, then endeavoured to publish in the newspapers and "tolstye žurnaly" ("thick journals") of the capital. Usually, the final phase was a separate publication when sufficient and suitable material was collected. Such was the case for Gor'kij's *Očerki i rasskazy*.

Gor'kij did not differ in this regard from his contemporaries, including Korolenko and Evgenij Nikolaevič Čirikov (1864-1932), who also published *Očerki i rasskazy*. His earlier involvement as editor of several newspapers including *Volgar'*, *Samarskaja gazeta* and *Nižegorodskij listok* in the 1890s provided him with three provincial channels of publication at the initial stages of his career. Later as a protègee of Korolenko, he published centrally in *Russkoe bogatstvo*, the organ of legal populism edited by Mixajlovskij, as well as in the legal Marxist journals *Novoe slovo* and *Žizn'*. Other newspapers and journals which carried his work included the liberal *Russkaja mysl'*, *Kosmopolis* and *Žurnal dlja vsex*, an imitation of the popular German magazine *Zeitschrift für alle*. Gor'kij also published in *Severnyj vestnik*, which was considered the primary organ of early Decadents and Symbolists.

The first documented evidence of Gor'kij's efforts to collect his stories for publication occurs in a letter to Korolenko in October 1895 when the writer revealed plans by the Prjanišnikov Publishing House to issue a collected volume of his works. Strangely, Gor'kij declined the offer, claiming it was too early to embark on such a venture. It should be noted that quite a number of the stories reprinted in the three volumes under discussion here had not yet been published. A more convincing reason why Gor'kij rejected this offer was his almost persistent lack of confidence in himself as a good writer.[37] Two years later, however, threatened by the untimely closure of *Novoe*

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[37] In fact, throughout Gor'kij's career he remained sceptical of his literary abilities and was quite frank about this weakness. This was especially so in his private correspondence with close friends. For example, Gorkij did not only express his embarrassment at his own work, on several occasions, including in a note accompanying some of his books to his friend Romain Rolland, the

slovo, he approached its editor V. Posse on the subject of collecting his stories. He did not meet with immediate success, but he was turned down by a number of publishing firms before reaching agreement with S.P. Dorovatovskij and his associate A.P. Čarušnikov, an old Populist activist.

The first volume of Gor'kij's stories published as *Očerki i rasskazy* appeared in March 1898, and numbered 3000 copies. Volume II appeared under the same title the following month and numbered 3500 copies in total. The third volume, along with a second edition of the first two volumes, appeared in September. One thing is common to all the stories Gor'kij selected for the three volumes: they had all been published elsewhere, at least once before and had been enthusiastically received by the critics and the public at large. They included those stories that portrayed the author as a freedom-loving, independent and strong-willed type, not afraid of confronting the dreariness in contemporary Russian life. Unlike his more renown predecessors, who were perceived to be subtle in their rage against the dreary aspects of Russian life, Gor'kij did not hesitate in denouncing the outmoded customs of his day. He adopted a confrontational and provocative approach aimed at arousing debate among his peers and the general public, at large.

Like many other beginners in the literary field at the time, Gor'kij took advantage of various positions he occupied in several local and provincial journals to publish most of the stories that were later put together in his collected works. It must be pointed out

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already mature writer openly spoke about his lack of confidence in himself as writer. See: "Korolenko i Gor'kij: iz perepiski.", Ogonëk, No. 4. 1937: 16; and Filia Holtzmann, *The Young Maksim Gorky 1868-1902*. (New York: Columbia U.P., 1948) 177-178.

that while the practice of republishing in book form works already published in journals and newspapers was widespread in Russia at the end of the last century, the benefit of hindsight may have allowed Gor'kij and his publishers to concentrate on a select number of stories that could provoke the most enthusiastic response, particularly from the reading public.

To be able to understand and appreciate contemporary critical opinion on these collections as well as public reaction to them, it is important to consider the content and nature of their stories. Volume I contained ten stories. They included "Makar Čudra", written in 1892 and first published in *Kavkaz* on September 12th of the same year, and "Čelkaš" which had first appeared in Volume XI of *Russkoe bogatsvo*, "Pesnja o sokole", "Na plotax" and "Skuki radi" all had appeared in *Samarskaja gazeta*; the first and second in March and April of 1895 and the last in December of 1893. Other stories included "Toska" which appeared in *Novoe slovo* in 1896, "Zazubrina" in *Žizn' juga* (Odessa) in 1897 and "Ded Arxip i Len'ka" in *Volgar'* in February 1894. "Ozornik" and "Suprugi Orlovy", both written in 1897, appeared in *Severnyj vestnik* and *Russkaja mysl'* respectively in the same year.

A quick look at the journals and newspapers in which Gor'kij's stories were published before they were collected reveals that the writer was not motivated in his choice of vehicles for publication by any ideology as some critics would later suggest. Rather, he seized on every opportunity to have his work published. An even more important point comes to the fore when one considers the choice of stories for these collections. Gor'kij's first collection was bent on portraying him basically as a *bosjak*

writer. To this end, half of these stories dealt with the *bosjak* character or theme. These included "Čelkaš" which had already made a strong impression on the public at its first appearance, "Makar Čudra", "Na plotax", "Ded Arxip i Len'ka" and "Suprugi Orlovy".

Characteristically for Gor'kij at this time, these stories ranged stylistically from romanticism to realism. Four of the ten featured Maksim as the narrator-persona, while all shared the element of confrontation by pitching one camp of characters against another. Thematically, they contained all the elements that would become synonymous with his early works: a desire for freedom, the expression of tensions not only between the individual and the group, but also between the artisan and the intelligentsia. These stories also included one legend ("Pesnja o sokole"). Finally, all of them were short stories; yet another indication of Gor'kij's sharing in the shift from the traditional long novels of the preceding decades symbolized by Dostoevskij and Tolstoj to the form of Čexov, which had become prominent in the 1890s.

Volume II included another ten stories ranging from "Konovalov" and "Byvšie ljudi", both published in *Novoe slovo* in 1897, "Jamarka v Goltve" and "Boles'" both appearing in *Nižegorodskij listok* in 1897, to "Delo s zastežkami" and "Staruxa Izergil'" which appeared in *Samarskaja gazeta* in 1895. "Ošibka", which was also included in this volume appeared the same year in *Russkaja mysl'* as was "Emeljan Piljaj" which was first published in *Russkie vedomosti* in 1893. Other stories included "O čiže kotorij lgal, i o djatele, ljubitele istiny" which appeared initially in *Volžskij vestnik* in 1893, and "V stepi" published in *Žizn' juga* in 1897. Of the ten, five had appeared earlier in newspapers while the other five had been published in periodicals. Again the *bosjak* element played an

important role in seven stories in this volume. In terms of genre, the scope of volume II was wider and ranged from the romantic and the mythical ("Mal'va") to the realistic and the naturalistic. Maksim features in seven of them as narrator, while the intelligentsia is the subject of "Ošibka". Eight out of the ten tales are adversarial.

Volume III also included ten stories in which five dealt again with the bosjak. They included "Kain i Artem", which appeared in *Mir božij* in 1899, "Moj sputnik" in *Samarakaja gazeta* in December 1894 and "Proxodimec", which appeared fully in *Žizn'* in 1898, having appeared earlier partly in *Nižegorodskij listok* in February of the same year. "Družki" appeared in *Žurnal dlja vsex* in 1898 and "Odnaždy osen'ju" in *Samarskaja gazeta* in 1895. Other stories included "O čerte" and "Ešče o čerte" which both appeared first in *Žizn'* in 1898. Together with "Čitatel'" which was first published in "Kosmopolis" in 1898, "Ešče o čerte", another programmatic story, whose main subject is a critique of philistinism, provides the writer's plan for literature. "Varen'ka Olesova" delves into the subject of the intelligentsia, while "Kirilka" deals with conflict among various groups that include the intelligentsia, the merchant, the bureaucrat, and the peasant.

Here, as before, Maksim appears in seven of the stories as narrator, while eight also feature opposing camps. As in the first two volumes, the author once again portrayed himself to the reader as a *bosjak* writer whose protagonist, Maksim identifies strongly with the wandering lot. A careful review of the composition of these volumes leads us to believe that Gor'kij and his publishers were neither totally unaware of the direction his oeuvre took, nor were they ignorant of the impression his work had on the public. In fact,

considering the enthusiastic reviews of Gor'kij's work by Posse, himself editor of *Novoe slovo,* it is safe to argue that the writer and his publishers embarked on a campaign aimed deliberately at creating a strong and lasting literary impression on the Russian reading public.

In general, as indicated earlier, Gor'kij did not discriminate in his choice of newspapers and journals, but rather took advantage of all available sources to publish his work. More importantly, access to the most respected and widely circulated journals, newspapers and publishing houses of the time assured him of a large readership and also put him closely in touch with the leading critics of the day, whose opinion played a significant role in the way he responded to the needs of the reader. This was especially evident in revisions of his work in later years.

From another standpoint, it could be argued that Gor'kij's initial refusal to commit himself to any particular literary or, for that matter, political faction broadened his appeal and maintained a high level of interest in his work as the issues he discussed cut across narrow and partisan interests. For example, the emphasis he put on issues like *bosjačestvo, meščanstvo* and the relationship between the intelligencija and the rest of Russia, three subjects which lay at the heart of contemporary Russian life, meant that even if his work did not appeal in an aesthetic sense to some segments of the population, his readers generally could still value its topical aspects.

Chapter Four

The *bosjak* stories and their role in popularizing Gor'kij in Russian literature

The *bosjak* stories, the most widely read works of Gor'kij's prose, played a major role in assuring his fame both at home and abroad. Their great appeal for the Russian reader, in particular, probably originates largely from their roots in the Russian literary tradition. They are ostensibly factographic in nature and are closely tied with the Siberian *brodjaga*, popular in Korolenko's fiction. What is highly notable about them is that they incorporate realist and romantic elements. While they reflect this combination, sought especially by Korolenko in his search for a literature that would maintain the Russian classical tradition and also inspire the reader, there is a novel element added to them, which is the peculiar trademark of Gor'kij. Gor'kij invests special powers in the construably autobiographical narrator-persona -- Maksim -- with whom he strongly identifies. More importantly for the success of the individual stories and their collective role in helping Gor'kij's fame, the writer presented them in a topical guise by taking on issues such as *bosjačestvo*, *meščanstvo*, *snoxačestvo*, the intelligentsia and the relationship between urban and rural life.

It is important to note that 17 of the 31 stories that comprised the first three volumes of Gor'kij's collected works which literally established his reputation both at home and abroad as a writer of note comparable to Tolstoj and Čexov have *bosjak* themes or characters. In fact, so important are the *bosjak* stories to the success of Gor'kij that

much of the earliest criticism on his work centres exclusively and rather repetitiously on them. Their popularity both with readers and critics can be seen not only in the numerous reprints and additions to the original volume of Gor'kij's first collected works, but also in the publication of critical reviews on these works. These reviews were published at the time in different literary organs and many articles were later reprinted in book form by the best publishing houses of the day.

The wanderer is found in artistic literature, ethnography and other non-fictional writings in the nineteenth century. All in all it is very prominent in classical Russian literature. Gor'kij's *bosjak* figures embody character traits that go as far back as those of the socially very different superfluous men such as Aleko in *Cygany* (1824) and the protagonist in *Evgenij Onegin* (1830), both by Puškin, Pečorin in *Geroj našego vremeni* (1840) by Mixail Jur'evič Lermontov (1814-1841); Čatskij in *Gore ot uma* (1833) by Aleksandr Sergeevič Griboedov (1795-1829; Rudin in the novel of the same name (1856) written by Ivan Sergeevič Turgenev (1818-1883; and Beltov in *Kto vinovat?* (1841-46) by Aleksandr Ivanovič Gercen (1812-1870, to mention but a few examples. Their main traits include severance from mainstream society with which they are out of step both in manner and objective. Similarly, these characters are markedly disillusioned with urban life from which they tend to take refuge by roaming the countryside, where they associate with people free of the ways of the city. Their travels normally take them to exotic lands where their interaction with people serves as an educative mission. They teach and are taught in their long adventures. Unlike the "lišnij čelovek" of nineteenth century Russian literature, Gor'kij's *bosjak* is not nobly born and well educated. He comes from the

people and closely identifies with them despite his serious reservations about their negative traits.

An important element of the *bosjak* character is a pervasive feeling of "toska" (a combination of restlessness, nostalgia and boredom) that can be described as contagious. Researchers on the works of Gor'kij trace it to Korolenko's *brodjagas* and even earlier to Nikolaj Semenovič Leskov's *Očarovannyj strannik* (1873). Not only is Ivan Severjanič Fljagin, the protagonist of Leskov's novel, the main source of that restlessness, that inherent "toska", the driving force of the wandering personality, he is also thought to be the source of the good naturedness and willingness to talk displayed by such characters as Emeljan Peljaj, Konovalov and Makar Čudra. It should be pointed out, however, that although Gor'kij's early treatment of the bosjak question closely paralleled Leskov's, especially in highlighting the good-naturedness of the *bosjak*, by the turn of the century, the writer was prone to look at this personality less favourably. Stylistically, there is a significant difference between Leskov and Gor'kij. This is most noticeable in the fact that while the skaz remained Leskov's mode of telling the experiences of his narrator, Gor'kij took a significantly different approach in which emphasis shifted from the "sobesednik" (companion) to the "ja" (I) narrator, who not only listened to tales told by others, but also participated in shaping some of the events recounted in these stories. The adaptation of such an approach by the writer at a time when the role of the individual was of foremost concern in Russian literature afforded him the opportunity to focus on the individual narrator as the main hero in his stories, and thus meet the literary aspirations of the time. Even more importantly, Gor'kij's ability to exploit this trend drew the attention of both

readers and critics.

An even greater and more direct influence on Gor'kij's art and characterization comes from the ethnographic and journalistic tradition practised by the Men of the Sixties and their followers. The achievements of minor writers in the "sixties" (1855-69) such as Nikolaj Gerasimovič Pomjalovskij (1835-63), Alexandr Ivanovič Levitov (1835-77), Vasilij Alekseevič Slepcov (1836-78), Fëdor Mixajlovič Rešetnikov (1841-71) and Gleb Uspenskij on the fringes of so-called "big" literature showed the democratic process at work. The radical intelligentsia, represented by the *raznočincy*, made their mark in literature at this time. In this type of literature, journalistic exposés and belles-lettres were combined to explore various aspects of Russian life during the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the resultant "reports" were so well written that they were as widely read as the best novels.[38] Two trends in this type of literature are of significance to Gor'kij in developing his particular brand of autobiographical narrative. They include a "...truthful picture of the peasant" which "counteracted sentimental and populist tendencies to idolize his lot" and the introduction through travel literature of "the important type of the Siberian *brodjaga*."[39]

Furthermore, the democratic and early populist prose of the 1860s and 1870s, in which the development of the narrator and wanderer are especially important, is yet another source of Gor'kij's *bosjak* figure. Of special significance in this area are the

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[38] Prince P.A. Kropotkin, *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1915) 231.

[39] Betty Y. Forman, "The Early Prose of Maksim Gorky 1892-1899" Ph. D. Thesis, (Massachusettes: Cambridge U.P., 1983) 424.

works of Levitov and Nikolaj Nikolaevič Zlatovratskij (1845-1911). A member of the group of writers and social activists popularly known as *Šestidesjatniki*, Levitov is credited with works dealing with the wanderer in which he balances the actions of his primary narrator and the subject of his stories. Like Gor'kij's narrator later, his is a self-taught wanderer on whom the writer focuses attention. His protagonist, Sizov, is the predecessor of Korolenko's Semenov in *Fedor Besprijutnyj* and his authorial persona Proxodjaščij (*Reka igraet*) is only a short step from Gor'kij's Maksim. On the whole, his stories of urban and rural poverty have an unembellished realism and are notable for an excellent use of lower class language.

Similarly, Zlatovratskij, popularly known as a romanticizer of village life is credited with playing a significant role in introducing the *bosjak* figure into Russian literature in a long story called *Predvoditel' zolotoj roty* (1877). His narrator is the intermediary between a *bosjak*, who is a former seminarian friend of his, and the larger group of *bosjaki* with whom he associates. Dissociated from the action itself, the narrator's source is his friend Sugubyj, who, resentful of having been bypassed for promotion takes to drinking and associates with the *bosjaki*. Though the writer focuses on highlighting Sugubyj's life, one gets a feel of *bosjak* life through his contact with them. Zlatovratskij provides a mass of background information on Sugubyj's life that shows wandering drunks and thieves saving old women, children and travellers from dangerous situations. But even more important for Gor'kij and his contemporaries is the writer's almost encyclopedic description of the core of people, who constituted the *bosjak* fold that came to be known as the "zolotoja rota." It was a mixture of people from

different professional, educational and social backgrounds.

The search for antecedents for Gor'kij's *bosjak* figure will be incomplete if one did not consider the work of Gleb Uspenskij and Nikolaj Uspenskij (1837-89). Whether it is in his best remembered collection of sketches *Nravy rasterjavoj ulicy*, 1866) based on the town of Tula, in which he describes with sensibility the plight of the urban poor, or in his cycle of stories (*Razorenie*, 1869-71) where he depicted the working class and the peasantry, G. Uspenskij's realism was documentary and unrelenting in its exposure of social evils. Similarly, N. Uspenskij, a cousin of Gleb, received applause for his unadorned stories depicting peasant poverty and vulnerability to exploitation.

Still other writers who dealt with the bosjak character at this time included Eronim Jasinskij (Maksim Belinskij, 1850-1931) and Semen Pavlovič Pod'jačev (1866-1934). It is significant to mention that an increasing number of writers turned their attention to the *bosjak* theme during the last two decades of the nineteenth century partly because of the famine of 1890-92 and the attendant cholera epidemic, which forced a lot of rural people into a wandering life. Thus, while Gor'kij's treatment of the subject overshadows the contribution of these other writers, nevertheless, many of them gained renown for their work on the subject.

Yet another important reason for Gor'kij's rapid rise to literary fame was the birth of a remarkable new trend in Russia of the 1880s which allowed the mass appreciation of writers as celebrities. The writer's personal life and style became increasingly closely linked with or even gained importance over the content of his work. While Puškin, in particular enjoyed a similar reputation in his day, Garšin and Nadson were thought to be

the first writers in the latter part of the century to have met with such enthusiastic appreciation from the reading public.

The reputations of Garšin and Nadson were based not only on the tragic appeal of their lives, but also on their personal charisma. Both were talented, good looking and ailing young men of glamorous origin, who died very early; the one tragically, the other through suicide. Their suicidal tendencies and the tragedy of their lives, accompanied by the general atmosphere of frustration and disappointment fitted in so well with the mood of the times that the period following their deaths witnessed a furore around them. Given this background, it is possible to understand why, despite a relatively small output by both writers, they were accorded a personal status unprecedented in Russian literature.

This tradition continued into the 1890s and is believed to have contributed in a large measure to Gor'kij's meteoric rise to literary fame. By the time the young writer arrived on the literary scene, it became possible for him to benefit from this appeal. With this approach, readers became as interested in the reputation of the author as in the content of his work. What seems to have favoured Gor'kij most was the coincidence of this trend with the proliferation of biographical and autobiographical literature. The latter gained the ardent support of important literary personalities like Korolenko, who regarded individual experience as an integral part of the new literature they advocated. Gor'kij took advantage of this new interest in the lives of writers to develop a literary personality in the persona of Maksim, whom he closely identified with himself.

Perhaps, a more immediate influence on Gorkij was the image of Tolstoj, whose ideas the younger writer flirted with in the 1880s. One recalls that at the invitation of

Mixail Romas, a populist activist, Gor'kij and several other sympathizers of the peasant cause set shop outside Kazan to help the latter. In fact, after the shop was burnt down, Gor'kij sought out Tolstoj in the hope of receiving land and advice for a self-sufficient agrarian project. He was turned away by Tolstoj's wife and the project failed.

In the stories in which Maksim plays a central role, the writer presents himself as a studious wanderer-learner associating with people who are able to pass onto him valuable information based on their life experiences. These would contribute to his own personal philosophy, in order to assume the role of a teacher. As Gor'kij's narrator graduates into a teacher and leader of other men, he moves from being a narrator of third person experiences to a person with strong, though not always definite views.

Through carefully planned manoeuvres, Gor'kij succeeded in creating an image of himself that set him apart from traditional members of the intelligentsia, while moving him in the direction of the worker and artisan. His tall and thick stature, unruly hair, his low voice and distinctive Volga accent went very well with a familiar outfit of well-kept, though expensive workman's clothes that included a *kosovorotka*, wide pants, high boots and a broad-brimmed hat which alternated with a wide cape for outdoor wear. In fact, it is believed that until his trip to the United States in 1905, when he began dressing in conventional suit and tie, Gor'kij maintained his familiar look for nearly a decade and a half. It is probably not surprising that this particular period also coincided with Gor'kij's rapid national and international popularity.

Of particular significance to Gor'kij's image was his much publicised origins from among the lower depths, his long association with tramps, and several brutal facts that the

author catalogues in his autobiography. What is probably important is that Gor'kij was able to provide a portrait of himself that reflected the main moods of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Thus, in a single move, Gor'kij was not only able to fill the literary void that had been thought to exist in the preceding decades, he was also able to satisfy the literary aspirations and ideals of leading literary personalities like Korolenko, Čexov and Merežkovskij (the first two demanded a literature of realism and idealism while latter sided with idealism) to replace the cheap literature of various journals which the latter, in particular, blamed for lowering the standards of Russian literature. Even more importantly, Gor'kij was able to hold himself up as the centrepiece of contemporary Russian literature.

No wonder, therefore that readers and critics alike hailed him not only as the most important contemporary writer after Čexov, but also as a spectacular social and political personality in the struggle against Czarist repression. It is important to mention that all these three roles as writer, social and political activist further drew the chagrin of the powers of the day, and their retaliation against him had the added effect of turning attention to Gor'kij while helping to enhance his place both in Russia and abroad. The latter is testified to by the numerous petitions and demonstrations on his behalf when he was arrested and detained in the Peter and Paul Fortress for his role in the failed revolution of 1905. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, it can be argued in the circumstances that, while Gor'kij may have deliberately sought to turn attention on himself through his creative talent, a considerable amount of the focus on him came from the Czarist regime. This was one of the many reasons why extra-literary factors came to

play a significant role in popularizing Gor'kij as a writer.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that while Gor'kij's early popularity and fame both with the reader and critics cannot be attributed entirely to the spontaneous success of his *bosjak* stories (and as such labelling him a single-issue writer is inappropriate), there is sufficient reason to argue that it played a substantial role in drawing national attention to him. Gor'kij not only capitalized on a contemporary national phenomenon to highlight a number of important issues that were of tremendous concern to himself and other writers, but also interested the Russian populace in himself. More importantly for the future of his career and the summing up of his role in Russian literature and culture, he reaped the dividends of a long period of collective effort by other writers and social activists who dealt with the *bosjak* subject.

Chapter Five

Contemporary Responses to Gor'kij's Early Prose (1892-1899)

Gor'kij's early prose spanned the period between 1892 when his first known short story was published in *Kavkaz* up to 1899 when he wrote his first novel -- *Foma Gordeev*. In fact, by the time he moved into the genres of the novel and the drama, which widened his thematic scope and subsequently polarized the debate about his contribution to Russian literature, Gor'kij had published about 140 short stories -- an average of about 20 per year. Various leading contemporary critics, including Aleksandr Mixajlovič Skabičevskij (1830-1910), Semen Afanas'evič Vengerov (1855-1920), N.K. Mixajlovskij, Angel Ivanovič Bogdanovič (1860-1907) and others expressed their views on his works in numerous articles as Gor'kij's stories were published.[40]

However, it was the publication of thirty of Gor'kij's short stories in three volumes in 1898 and 1899 that led to the most comprehensive reviews of his work up to that point. This resulted not only in re-issues of earlier critical works which had appeared in less known publications and were now reprinted in more central newspapers and journals, but also attracted the first full-size books completely devoted to Gor'kij's work. Such works included Andreevič's (Evgenij Solov'iev) *Kniga o Maksime Gor'kom i A.P.*

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[40] The first critical opinion on Gor'kij's fiction appeared in 1893 in the newspaper *Volgar'* in Nižnij Novgorod on October 26, and dealt with "Makar Čudra" and "Emeljan Piljaj". In it Gor'kij was cited as a newcomer on the literary scene with a tremendous poetic gift.

Čexove (1900), and *Kritičeskie étjudy o proizvedenijax M. Gor'kogo* (1901), T. Aleksandrovskij's *Maksim Gor'kij i ego sočinenija. Publičnie lekcii. Kritičeskij očerk.* (1901), and *Kritičeskie stat'i o proizvedenijax Maksima Gor'kogo* (1901), a work central to the role of Gor'kij's contribution to Russian letters edited by S. Grinberg, as well as *Kritičeskoe posobie. Sbornik vydajušixsja statej russkoj kritiki za 100 let* (N.d.) edited by L.O. Veinberg, and *Russkaja literatura XX veka 1890-1910* (1914) which was edited by S. Vengerov. While this list is by no means exhaustive, the contributors represent the most authoritative voices in Russian literature at the time and their views are representative of scholarly and critical contemporary opinions about Gor'kij's work in the first decade of his literary career.

In this section of the thesis, I intend to offer an overview of some of the most typical reactions to Gor'kij's early prose with a view to showing how some of these initial reactions came to leave their mark permanently on the image of the writer. While it is practically impossible to include all the opinions expressed in the period under consideration because of the sheer size of the reaction Gor'kij's work provoked among his contemporaries, I have chosen to deal with the most durable of these opinions as well as the main trends in the debate on his contribution to pre-revolutionary Russian literary and cultural life. To this end, I have included in the ensuing discussion comments of some of the most popular and respected critics and literary personalities of the day.

It shoulc' also be mentioned that while a good deal of this material was contained in a few major publications of the time, the views they express are a result of a synthesis of studies conducted on Gor'kij's short stories, in particular, and on his world view in

general. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the vast majority of the books mentioned were published in and after 1900, by which time Gor'kij had effectively exhausted the *bosjak* subject and embarked on new thematic frontiers. That is to say that the debate over Gor'kij's contribution to and his place in Russian literature had been under way for over seven years and that the majority of the contributors to the works cited here had long been familiar with the writer. While it is evident from the critical material available to us from this period that some critics considered Gor'kij's career still too short to pass definitive judgement on his contribution to Russian literature, it is also clear that many agreed that irrespective of Gor'kij's future development as a writer, he had already secured himself a lasting place in the literary and cultural life of Russia.

Before I proceed with a thematic discussion of the contributions of various critics to this debate, I would like to say a word about the bibliographical sources for the works included here. While the references here are limited largely to a smaller number of publications especially in book form, it must be made clear that a majority of the articles cited in these works were published earlier in several important newspapers and journals at the time. Thus, it is with a view to avoiding the frequent quotation of these articles, published sometimes simultaneously in more than one literary organ in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in other cities such as Kiev and Odessa, that I have chosen instead to cite them in the book versions which not only appeared later, but are also more complete. Additionally, it is likely that only the most respected and durable opinions expressed about Gor'kij had the advantage of being preserved in book form. This is especially true about those published by the most reputable publishing houses.

The enthusiasm shown by contemporary critics towards Gor'kij can be seen in the remarks of A. Bogdanovič in a preface to a collection of critical essays about the author. Commenting on Gor'kij's writing shortly after the first volume of the author's short stories was published, Bogdanovič observed in an article entitled "Maksim Gor'kij (bibliografičeskij očerk)"[41] that in spite of the fact that Gor'kij appeared on the literary scene only five years earlier, critics had reacted more to him and his work than to some of his older contemporaries for the whole duration of their literary life. He rejected claims by some critics that Gor'kij owed his popularity to his individual personality or his biography. Instead, Bogdanovič attributed the enormous attention the author had attracted in both the metropolitan and provincial press to his talent and literary abilities. In particular, he cited Mixail Osipovič Men'šikov (1859-1919) and P. Krasnov, who, in separate articles in *Nedelja* and *Novyj mir* respectively, had attributed the writer's popularity mainly to his almost mythical origins.

Nevertheless, Bogdanovič did not reject outright the possibility that public reaction to a writer's work could indicate his success or failure. However, he contended that this alone was insufficient to guarantee success. Citing Lixajlov's (Šeller's) short-lived popularity as an example of the misleading results that can be obtained by applying such an approach to measure success, Bogdanovič drew attention to the numerous critical works dedicated to Gor'kij and rejected claims that Gor'kij owed his literary success primarily to his unusual biography and to the fact that his works were devoted to people

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[41] S. Grinberg, ed. *Kritičeskie stat'i o proizvedenijax M. Gor'kogo*. (St. Petersburg: 1901) vii-xvi.
* This book shall be referred to subsequently as *Kritičeskie stat'i.*, followed by the year of publication.

like himself.

Bogdanovič underscored the importance of Gor'kij's biography in contemporary criticism and conceded that the writer owed a great deal of his success to his personal experiences and observations of life. However, he argued that, rather than attribute Gor'kij's success to extra-literary factors, critical material available on the author's work showed that he had a certain talent which life had helped to sharpen. He pointed out that while Gor'kij's biography may have been unusual in the Russian context, examples of similar lives abounded in European and world literature.

Bogdanovič claimed that Gor'kij owed his popularity more to the success of his literary work than anything else. His admiration for the young writer was such that he not only praised him, saying: "On obladaet gromadnym xudožestvennym talantom, glubokim xudožestvennym čuvstvom, kotoroe proizvodit sil'noe vlijanie na každogo čitatelja",[42] but also described his work in his main contribution to the critical opinions on Gor'kij's early works as: "edva li ne samoe vidnoe javlenie, po svežesti i original'nosti talanta, jarkogo i sil'nogo, i po novizne soderžanija, vsegda interesnogo i gluboko zaxvatyvajuščego čitatelja."[43] It is in light of this that he praised Gor'kij's talent and artistic strength, saying:

> ... on imeet v svoix očerkax stol'ko novogo i neožidannogo, čto pered nami vstaet celyj mir, soveršenno obosoblennyj, čerezvyčajno raznoobraznyj po tipam i xarakteram, ne ukladyvajuščijsja v ramki obyčnogo predstavlenija o brodjagax i zolotorotcax, kakix my privikli vstrečat' v rasskazax drugix pisatelej.[44]

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[42] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: xvi.

[43] Ibid., 27.

[44] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 27.

While Bogdanovič conceded that the characters in Gor'kij's work were preceded by those of Levitov, he claimed that, unlike Gor'kij, Levitov poeticized his heroes to the point of sentimentality. For this reason, he preferred Gor'kij's work to those of his predecessor and argued that:

> Očerki g. Gor'kogo dajut ne menee žestokuju pravdu, no avtor s istinno xudožestvennyn taktom sumel vezde uderžat'sja ot preuveličenij, predostavljaja samym gerojam govorit' za sebja. Otsutsvie liričeskix izlijanij i polnyj ob'ektivizm ego rasskaza uglubljajut soderžanie, a neposredstvennaja poétičeskaja žilka, čuvstvujušajasja vezde v opisanijax prirody, delaet ego kartyny xudožestvenno-zakončennymi.[45]

It is important to note that Bogdanovič's appraisal of Gor'kij's work differs substantially from that of N. Minskij, who joined Tolstoj and Čexov in accusing the writer of interfering with his heroes.[46] Bogdanovič praised Gor'kij for resisting exaggerations and allowing his characters to speak for themselves. Furthermore, he emphasized Gor'kij's ability to avoid lyricism and added that his ingenuous poetic bent for nature descriptions produced accomplished artistic works.

Bogdanovič challenged the claim that Gor'kij's heroes were given to philosophising and argued instead that what was most important for contemporary readers was not the questions these characters asked, but their personalities. It should be kept in mind that this is one of the main differences critics have repeatedly stressed in separating Gor'kij from other writers, who dealt with similar subjects. The general impression has been that Gor'kij's originality was in his daring and in his ability to give the tremendous

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[45] Ibid., 28.

[46] Ibid., 17-26.

task of seeking the meaning of life to tramps and to others at the fringes of society.

For example, Bogdanovič observed that Konovalov, Orlov, Nikolaj and their likes were more active in their pursuit of life than their predecessors. He noted that, unlike these, Gor'kij's characters showed a more-than-theoretical interest in finding solutions to age-old questions, for these solutions provided them with the keys to everyday life. Bogdanovič's observation seems to support the overall impression among critics that Gor'kij continued and widened the tradition in Russian literature that defended the "little man" by introducing a more practical, down-to-earth and effectual character.

Closing his essay with an extensive summary of the primary elements of Gor'kij's art, Bogdanovič pointed to the gallery of people in his stories, and unlike many contemporary critics who were reluctant to say anything conclusive about the writer's artistic strengths and prospects for the future, he also declared his full admiration and sympathies for him:

> Lučšie očerki osveščeny im, i nesomnennyj krupnyj talant g. Gor'kogo razvertyvaetsja iz nix s osobym bleskom i original'nost'ju. "Konovalov" i "Suprugi Orlovy" napisany prevosxodno i za poslednij god predstavljajut lučšie xudožestvennye proizvedenija v tekujuščej literature. Jazyk Gor'kogo neobyknovenno garmoniruet s opisyvaemymi im tipami, po svoej prostote i bezyskusstvennosti, a prevosxodnoe znanie sredy delaet éti očerki svoego rodami šedevrami. Žizn' geroev, ix xaraktery, samye složnye duševnye dviženija razvertyvajutsja pred čitateljami estestvenno, živo, bez vsjakix preuveličenij i prikras, bez neudačnyx popytok na naročituju glubinu, čto v obščem proizvodit vpečatlenie polnejšej iskrennosti i pravdivosti. Avtor mnogo videl, mnogo dumal, mnogo i sam perenes tjaželogo i besotradnogo, no, kak istinnyj xudožnik, nigde ne vydvigaet sebja, i tol'ko v obrazax, očerčennyx smelo i jarko, možno pročest' bespokojaščie ego mysli, volnenija i želanija. Gluxie i mračnye zakoulki bol'šix gorodov, kuda on vvodit' čitatelja, oživajut, vostajut v étix očerkax, kak živoj ukor' obščestvu, malo obraščajuščemu na nix vnimanija, a žizn', kipjaščaja tam, svoeobraznaja i malo issleduemaja do six por, raskryvaetsja

> s takix storon, kotorye otkryvajut novye perspektivy. Voprosy, teoretičeski volnujuščie mnogix čitatelej, zdes' volnujut kak žestokaja dejstvitelnost', trebujuščaja praktičeskix otvetov.[47]

Judging from Bogdanovič's observations about Gor'kij's talent and literary abilities, it is safe to argue that while he did not consider the writer entirely original in his subject matter and characterization, he believed that he deserved credit as an innovative newcomer, whose approach set him apart from other contemporary authors. The critic not only minimized the role played by Gor'kij's biography and personal standing with the Russian public in promoting his work and image in particular, he focused entirely on the purely literary aspects of the writer's contribution to Russian cultural life and expressed optimism that the literary community would hear more from him.

Following Bogdanovič's lead in the defence of Gor'kij as a talented and original writer, V. Posse, editor of the Marxist journal *Novoe slovo* and one of Gor'kij's first publishers, rejected charges of repetition raised against him by critics who compared his work to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. He insisted in "Pevec protestujušej toski (M. Gor'kij. Očerki i rasskazy, 2 Toma. 1898g."[48] that despite the role played by other writers in helping contemporary readers understand his work, they did not exhaust the subject completely. Posse argued that through their artistic talent, Gor'kij and others contributed to society by giving more meaning to life and by opening gates previously shut to ordinary people. He pointed out that however original a writer is, he always has

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[47] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 41.

[48] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 3-16.

predecessors though his emphasis and talent may point in a particular direction and result in a peculiar perspective on life.

In light of the above, Posse observed that while contemporary readers were familiar with the basic tone of Gor'kij's work, this neither detracted from its meaning nor reduced interest in it. He maintained that while the main mood of Gor'kij's heroes was not entirely new because of significant similarities with the work of Levitov, Zlatovratskij and G. Uspenskij, the individuals in his work were both new and original. He also stressed that the variety of his work demonstrated the power and originality of his talent.

Picking up on a common theme among contemporary critics, Posse linked the main features and attitudes of Gor'kij's heroes with the major heroes of important Russian writers like Gogol', Mixail Evgrafovič Saltykov-Ščedrin (1826-1829), Turgenev and Tolstoj. This theme would later play an important role in Soviet criticism which had the tendency to stress that Gor'kij continued the tradition of nineteenth-century realism. Like many of his contemporaries, the critic considered Gor'kij a continuer of a long Russian tradition in defence of the "little man". However, probably beginning what would become a common approach among Soviet supporters of Gor'kij's legacy as a proletarian writer, Posse distinguished between him and his predecessors by pointing out that while they were members of the privileged class, observing the life of common people from the outside, Gor'kij was the first writer-representative of the working class whose efforts were dedicated to a life with which he was entirely familiar. He argued that, unlike high society writers who remained products of their own class and environment even in the way they portrayed life among the masses, Gor'kij was a true proletarian whose creative

talent covered traditional domains monopolised earlier by writers of a high social standing.

In another move that would impact on Gor'kij's image in later years, Posse objected to comparing Gor'kij's stories with the work of Dmitrij Vasil'evič Grigorovič, which he qualified as sugary ("slaščavyj") or even to those of Zlatovratskij and G. Uspenskij. Instead, he compared them with those of Gogol', Turgenev and Ščedrin and argued that:

> tvorčeskij talant Gor'kogo prizvan otkrivat' obščečelovečeskie stremlenija i nastroenija v nizšix, obezdolennyx narodnyx slojax, kak éto sdelali xudožestvennye talanty Gogolja, Turgeneva, Tolstogo i Ščedrina v rodstvennoj im privilegirovannoj srede.[49]

The importance of such comparisons are noteworthy in that they played an important role in putting Gor'kij above most of his contemporaries by increasingly associating him with the Russian classics.

Nevertheless, Posse pointed out that while Gor'kij dealt with some high society issues common to his more popular predecessors, the tramp constituted the core of his work. Reviewing the major characteristics of Gor'kij's tramp-heroes, he pointed out both their individualistic nature and their conflict with the existing social order. Posse observed that, on the whole, it is hard to categorize them as good or bad people, since everything around them is sudden and unexpected. For example, he observed that good nature and kindness replaced wickedness and meanness among them on the spur of the moment. The importance of spontaneity as a significant contributing factor to the success of Gor'kij's short stories cannot be overemphasized since it became a common refrain in early

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[49] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 4.

criticism.

In his comments on Gor'kij's artistic method and personal relationship with his heroes, Posse emphasized that the writer not only wrote from the bottom of his heart, but was also truthful and passionate about what he wrote. He pointed out that Gor'kij's work contained his suffering, love and hatred and made his pulse sound loud in his art. Posse observed that the writer shared with his heroes an active distress full of protest.

As before, this close identification between Gor'kij and his characters played a major role in the more populist side of his image, especially in the period when the cult of the author as celebrity began to take shape. In addition to Gor'kij's own conscious efforts to identify with his heroes, Russian readers increasingly saw his personal life as an extension of the lives of his heroes.

Turning to nature descriptions in Gor'kij's work, which he considered to be spontaneous and comparable to folk poetry, full of energy and freshness, Posse pointed out that Gor'kij's art gave a new and animated look to his surroundings. Subsequently, he characterized the writer's treatment of nature as follows:

> Kak v molodom narodnom soznanii, tak v soznanii Gor'kogo mertvaja priroda oduxotvorjaetsja, očelovečivaetsja, oživaetsja. Gor'kij slivaet s nej, -- s bespredel'noj bezkonečno izmenčivoj -- vse volnenija, vse poryvy svoej čelovečeskoj duši. Priroda pod ego tvorčeskim dunoveniem smeetsja, plačet, toskuet, rvetsja vpered i protestuet.[50]

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50 *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 14.

Posse stressed the almost human aspect of nature descriptions in Gor'kij's work by using a succession of epithets that make an immediate impression on the reader. His description of the writer's approach to nature is not only lively, but also representative of the almost unanimous consensus among critics on Gor'kij's superb handling of nature scenes. In addition, he singled out the equally strong and natural application of visual and sound effects in Gor'kij's work and noted his ability to convert sound impressions into visual images and vice versa. Posse observed a two-way flow of spiritual and material imagery which affected the internal mood of Gor'kij's reader, resulting in an identification of feelings with the author.

Clearly, Posse's approach to Gor'kij emphasized the utilitarian, but avoided the purely literary aspects of his work. As such, the results of his survey were predictable, especially in light of the shared ideological and economic interests between the two. It must be remembered that as one of Gor'kij's early publishers, Posse it was in his interest to see Gor'kij succeed.

In general, Posse expressed a high opinion of Gor'kij both as writer and innovator and as someone who shared Gor'kij's vision of the world. Posse's remarks were among the first to go beyond the cultural and artistic levels into the ideological. In sum, he predicted a groundbreaking future for him and insisted that he would continue to make his presence felt in Russian culture and literature.

It was just such a hope for the successful long continuation of Gor'kij's career that manifested itself in the comments of the next critic. Nikolaj Minskij, an early propagator of Nietzschean ideas in Russia who took important elements of his social, religious and

esthetic philosophy from Nietzsche which he set forth in "Filosofija toski i žažda voli. M. Gor'kij. *Očerki i rasskazy*, tom pervyj. Spb 1898g."[51] interpreted the remarkable attention paid by critics of all shades and the best journals of the day to Gor'kij as a measure of the trust and hope invested in him despite his recent appearance on the literary scene. Minskij found that the first collection of Gor'kij's work demonstrated with certainty that a fresh, outstanding, talented and incredibly varied author had entered Russian literature.

Minskij conceded that Gor'kij was not without his shortcomings. However, he is full of praise for Gor'kij when he observed that the young and upcoming writer got his inspiration not from other writers, but from reality as he saw and observed it. The latter perception would later prove to be an important consideration in Gor'kij's attempts at promoting himself, since this claim, which becomes commonplace among early commentators, goes a long way to establish his image as an original voice with little or no influence from other writers.

Additionally, Minskij's comments also preceded similar observations made by several contemporary critics, including Merežkovskij, that, like Čexov, the early Gor'kij had strong impressionist leanings. Whether this last point was a result of Minskij's own impressionist background or not, it demonstrates Gor'kij's ability to take advantage of other literary trends existent at the time. As well, it was this versatility on the part of Gor'kij that made it possible for him to be compared to the great Russian writers.

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[51] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 17-26.

Discussing the main themes in Gor'kij's work, Minskij listed the lives of petty tradesmen, sailors, tramps and poor folks among the writer's favourite subjects. He pointed out that Gor'kij preferred the strong and free instincts of life, while his favourite settings included the south Russian steppe and the sea. Like Bogdanovič and Posse earlier, Minskij observed that Gor'kij chose the brightest colours and moments for his work. He also claimed that relations between Gor'kij's characters reach a peak in the conflict between life and death, adding that in these conflicts the writer's sympathies lie with the stronger side. In the view of the critic, each of the stories contains a whole world of everyday details and events, which is accompanied by a complex inner drama aimed at probing the meaning of life. Minskij argued that irrespective of individual opinion on Gor'kij's ideas and artistic approach, it is hard to ignore his artistic power, as well as the talent and passion embodied in the stories. Similarly, he pointed to the enormous impression created by Gor'kij's work on contemporary readers and concluded that he would be highly rated if he were judged by only these impressions.

However, Minskij preferred to assess Gor'kij solely on the basis of artistic creation. In this regard, he observed that the main limitation in arriving at a proper assessment of the young writer was that opinions on his literary career focused primarily on the first volume of his short stories. This notwithstanding, he claimed that except for Gor'kij's tendency toward sentimentality and melodrama, he was artistically closest to Anton Čexov. He pointed out, however, that, unlike the latter, Gor'kij was passionate and judgemental, and also inclined to see drama everywhere. Minskij contended that where such drama proved insufficient, Gor'kij turned it into melodrama. He attributed this

approach to the writer's impassioned and subjective attitude to the kind of life described in his work. Moreover, the critic pointed out that Gor'kij tended not only to make his characters the mouthpiece of his ideas, but also to involve himself directly in their lives by advocating his personal views through them. Minskij argued that, as a result of this, Gor'kij's stories contained middle-class people involved in philosophical discussions about life that go beyond their level of understanding.

Obviously, Minskij's position regarding objectivity in Gor'kij's work conflicted with that of Bogdanovič, Posse and even Korolenko, who all maintained the writer's non-interference with his characters in his oeuvre. The distinction in approach between Minskij and the latter group can be seen in their respective approaches to literature. Unlike the rest, Minskij accorded less importance to the sociological approach to literature and thus arrived at a substantially less favourable opinion of Gorkij's writing. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Minskij drew the attention of his readers to the fact that Gor'kij's praise for the strong appeared daring and risky. Such an approach provided a fresh alternative to a literature preoccupied with good and evil in a period of perceived creative impasse. Besides which, he pointed out that the path Gor'kij pursued also provided a rallying point -- especially for the young in their quest for something active and challenging.

Over all, Minskij called the first volume of Gor'kij's short stories a serious literary work and pointed out that the author deserved attention even if it was for the exclusive reason that he took a personalized look at life, free from the traditional constraints of Russian literature. While the critic stopped short of making any hard and fast judgements

about Gor'kij's work, explaining that he would rather wait for the second volume of his stories to confirm his thoughts in another article, he admitted that Gor'kij's approach showed a lot of courage and uncommon strength. It could be argued that Minskij's guarded approach in defining Gor'kij's role both in contemporary Russian literature and in the future is a further indication of his less than enthusiastic acceptance of the writer's work either as groundbreaking or long-lasting.

The debate over Gor'kij's place and contribution to Russian literature continued in N.K. Mixajlovskij's analysis of the writer's early works in a series of publications, the most important among which was a long article entitled "O g. Maksime Gor'kom i ego gerojax."[52] It must be mentioned here that Mixajlovskij wrote several profound articles on the early works of Maksim Gor'kij from the perspective of a leading Populist writer and a critic of note.[53] As a leading critic of the day and editor of the moderate journal *Russkoe bogatstvo*, Mixajlovskij was one of a group of early Russian critics to whom Gor'kij owed his understanding and application of Nietzsche.

Mixajlovskij observed that while contemporary critics welcomed Gor'kij's stories for their freshness and originality when they were first published, they were also greeted with scepticism by readers and critics alike. He attributed this initial cool reception to the fact that both groups had been disappointed by other writers who had shown similar

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[52] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 53-105.

[53] Other works by Mixajlovskij on Gor'kij's writing ranged from "Ešče o Maksime Gor'kom i ego gerojax" *Russkoe bogatstvo* No. 10: 61-93 to "Koe-čto o sovremennoj belletristike" *Russkoe bogatstvo* No. 1. 1899. In them, the critic evaluated the Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature along similar lines as in "O g. Maksime Gor'kom i ego gerojax."

initial success in their career. Mixajlovskij pointed out, however, that the publication of the first two volumes of Gor'kij's short stories not only satisfied the expectations of his readers, but also proved beyond doubt that he was a writer of considerable substance. In fact, he claimed that apart from providing his readers with artistic satisfaction, Gor'kij's short stories had put his name forever on the map of Russian literature even if he were to stop writing. Mixajlovskij observed that while it can be argued that Gor'kij had not opened new doors for Russian literature, there was little doubt that he had drawn attention to the world of the tramp which received all his talent and attention.

Mixajlovskij reviewed one of Gor'kij's most interesting and well known stories, "Čelkaš", and commented first on the writer's liking for and superb handling of nature descriptions. He pointed out that Gor'kij was so successful in this area that an average sampling of his work revealed a strong artistic mind. The critic also commented on an issue that was dear to him and stressed that critics praised Gor'kij for the same reason that Čexov was hailed -- namely for putting down the peasant. Mixajlovskij cited widespread contempt for the peasant among Gor'kij's heroes and observed that the actions of Sereža in "Mal'va" constitute the most serious indictment yet of the peasant in his work. Calling this approach a recent trend in Russian literature, the critic added that the attitude of Gor'kij's tramp was not limited to the peasant as the latter was dissatisfied with both the metropolis and the countryside. In addition, Mixajlovskij observed that, irrespective of their origins, Gor'kij's tramps tend to consider themselves superior to others.

Citing Mixail Antonič, a worker in "Toska", who had lost both arms in a conveyor belt accident in circumstances that are not clear to the reader, Mixajlovskij pointed out that Gor'kij does not provide sufficient information on circumstances that lead to dramatic changes in the lives of his heroes. The source of frequent criticism among contemporary critics, Gor'kij's silence on the tragedy of Mixail and others like him, provided Mixajlovskij the opportunity to accuse the writer of failing to show sufficiently how and why hard life caught up with his heroes. He noted that where the writer decided to introduce the biographies of his characters into his work, they were usually interrupted at their climax.

Like most of his contemporaries, Mixajlovskij admitted that the majority of Gor'kij's heroes were philosophers and poets. Unlike them, however, he insisted that these protagonists had their philosophical roots in personal experience as opposed to being influenced by people. He argued that they did not make any adaptations from well-known theories, although, he admitted, it was sometimes hard to reconcile their essential profiles with many things in their speeches and behaviour. However, he maintained that Gor'kij was familiar with the events and the places he described, and this, he claimed, helped to make his characters believable.

Mixajlovskij's defence of the credibility of Gor'kij's characters is very significant. The veteran critic not only absolved Gor'kij from accusations of philosophical moralizations which tended to burden his prose, he also contributed to the impression that because Gor'kij's observations were made first-hand through his extensive travels in the Russian countryside, they were original, objective and therefore reliable. Moreover,

Mixajlovskij argued that in addition to the fact that some sources of Gor'kij's heroes were new, their psychology itself was entirely new. He observed that, unlike their predecessors in Russian literature who tended to bond together, they were extremely individualistic, entering into relationships accidentally and only for short periods. Similarly, the critic noted their refusal to work in that they did not consider it an obligation. Nevertheless, Mixajlovskij concluded that their lifestyle was dubious because of its erratic nature.

Mixajlovskij commented on the talent and artistic abilities of the author and noted that while he continued to draw attention to himself, there was neither general consensus on his talent nor on the originality of the subjects with which he dealt. He pointed out that some critics credited Gor'kij with a great deal of talent and originality, yet others were sceptical about his capabilities and future prospects as a writer. He admitted, in a rather candid manner, that Gor'kij lacked artistic tact. At the same time, Mixajlovskij challenged Ignatov's criticism of Gor'kij's heroes,[54] and objected to what he called their sometimes false idealization.

Commenting on Gor'kij's female characters, Mixajlovskij compared them to those of Dostoevskij. While Dostoevskij's women were softer toward each other, he observed that Gor'kij's were more frank and open. Mixajlovskij cited the love scars left by Izergil' and Konovalov's lovers respectively as indications of their true and open nature. In the same vein, he noted the duality of Gor'kij's characters with respect to their love of pleasure and pain. Citing claims among Gor'kij's heroes that sadness touches the soul and gradually brings out the best in people, Mixajlovskij characteristically showed his

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[54] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 73.

contempt for this attitude by pointing out that it betrayed their intense desire to live freely at all cost. It bears emphasizing that Gor'kij's mixture of the elements of pain and pleasure in his early works raised doubts in Mixajlovskij's mind and elicited censure from him, as had been the case for Dostoevskij.

It is also significant that he and other critics compared Gor'kij's work with those of more popular writers. This is particularly important because close identification with local and foreign literary "heavyweights" like Dostoevskij and Tolstoj, on the one hand, and Nietzsche and Goethe, on the other, went a long way to enhance his image in later years for even his weaknesses could be justified by pointing to similar occurrences in the work of his more renowned predecessors.[55]

On the subject of protest by Gor'kij's characters, Mixajlovskij described it as scattered, and emphasized instead that the majority of Gor'kij's heroes were dreamers, fascinated by a certain vision of the world. Similarly, he focused on the presence of a strong and pervasive destructive element among them, and also identified their desire to dominate others. Mixajlovskij observed that while Gor'kij's characters rejected all authority, they had an obsession to dominate others in that this gave them satisfaction and reinforced their superiority over others.

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[55] In his article "Krasivyj cinizm. (M. Gor'kij, rasskazy TI, II, III, IV. Spb. 1900.)" pp. 181-209, published in *Kritičeskie stat'i o proizvedenijax M. Gor'kogo*. (St. Petersburg: 1901), Men'šikov argued that initial mistakes made by Gor'kij at the beginning of his career should not be held against him inasmuch as even great writers like Turgenev and Dostoevskij experienced similar difficulties in their formative years.

Observing that in the process of writing, writers create and imbue literary personalities with specific qualities instead of accepting them ready-made, Mixajlovskij argued that writing is a conscious, goal-oriented art that expresses in the main the ideas of the author. Therefore, in order to obtain a true picture of Gor'kij's characters, Mixajlovskij thought it important to consider Gor'kij's world view. It is on the basis of this that he differentiated among characters like Konovalov, Čelkaš and Orlov, whom he called real, even if coloured, and others like Danko, Larra, Sokol and the Siskin, whom he described as fantastic.

In devoting his analysis to the latter group, the critic insisted that besides providing a better insight into Gor'kij's thinking, these legendary heroes also afford the reader an opportunity to observe his characters from their own perspective. He argued that through these legendary and fantastic figures, Gor'kij was able to avoid the sentiments that normally overwhelm him in his depiction of real characters.

It is against this background that Mixajlovskij reviewed "Makar Čudra", dwelling on Loiko Zobar and Radda, the protagonists of the work. While he praised the beauty of the story's setting, its hyperbolic comparisons and wealth of detail, he found that, on the whole, "Makar Čudra" did not make a good impression. As in other Gor'kij stories, Mixajlovskij identified a strong desire among the characters to live above others. For example, he pointed out that both Zobar and Radda are freedom lovers who consider their love for one another a threat to their existence. The critic observed that though Radda knew her fate in advance of her brutal death, she was willing to accept it. Mixajlovskij found in this episode another reminder of the mixture of pleasure and pain associated with

Dostoevskij's female characters and called Radda a poeticized version of Mal'va from the story of the same name. He added that Radda's relationship with Zobar did not differ in its non-commitment from that found in many other works by Gorkij. For example, in his comments on "Pesnja o Sokole", the critic observed that, like Zobar and Radda, Sokol died without complaint. He pointed out that though Sokol fell short of his objective, he was more fulfilled at the end as he saw the heights literally and rose metaphorically above others. Besides, he noted that the bird believed his actions had paved the way for the future and were worth the sacrifice. Mixajlovskij added that while the puff adder found such adventure stupid and worthless, the legend clearly disagrees with him and supports instead the glory associated with the falcon's flight.

Similarly, Mixajlovskij observed that the fate of the Siskin in "O čiže, kotoryj lgal i o djatele -- ljubitele istiny" did not differ significantly from that of his predecessors. He noted that, although the Siskin was unable to carry the other birds with him because of the untimely intervention of the woodpecker, she does not despair. She confesses to lying, but for a good purpose, namely to awaken the ideals of faith and hope in the other birds. It should be mentioned that the attitude of the Siskin draws attention to the role of the "elevated lie" -- a common theme in Gor'kij's work, which was best represented by Luka in *Na dne*.

Another important feature of Gor'kij's characters which Mixajlovskij signalled to the reader is pettiness. He observed in his comments that both the birds in "O čiže, kotoryj lgal i o djatele -- ljubitele istiny" and Danko's tribe people display an attitude of pettiness. For example, he noted that, like the Siskin, Danko is often isolated from the

crowd, while Larra experienced a similar fate when he refused to submit to the law of the land.

Having considered the similarities between the so-called fictional characters and the "real" ones in Gor'kij's short stories, Mixajlovskij concluded that Zobar, Radda, sokol, čiž, Danko and Larra are all cleansed and idealized variants of his tramps. He claimed that they were transformed Čelkašes, Mal'vas and Kuvaldas. They share the same avidity for life and unlimited freedom, and they manifest a similar sense of isolation and denial. To this list, Mixajlovskij added the tendencies of high self-esteem, a strong desire to compete with and subdue others and the striving for high, even if impossible ideals, which is often accompanied by the risk of death. He pointed out that Gor'kij's legendary heroes also showed a similar thirst for pleasure and seemed to distinguish little between pleasure and pain.

Nevertheless, Mixajlovskij also noted the two groups of characters. He argued that while Gor'kij's characters continue an old tradition in Russian literature and cannot be said to be a distinct class of their own, they include some new faces. Similarly, he admitted that the psychology of Gor'kij's characters was entirely different from that of their predecessors. It must be pointed out that given Mixajlovskij's influence, his being non-committal about Gor'kij's originality left the door open for the supporters of the author to argue increasingly that he was original. This was especially so since it has been argued that Gor'kij built on the *bosjak* theme by widening the scope of the characters.

Recalling an article he wrote in *Russkoe bogatstvo* for the year 1894 on the relationship between Nietzsche and Dostoevskij, Mixajlovskij drew attention to the

feelings of not belonging, vindictiveness, hatred and protest against everything among their heroes. While the critic identified similar sentiments among Gor'kij's heroes, he refused to conclude that the latter was influenced by Nietzsche. Instead, Mixajlovskij emphasized the absence of *direct* Nietzschean influences, allowing supporters of the writer a valuable reference that would recur in the formation of his image -- particularly in the Soviet era. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that Mixajlovskij did not find the coincidence of ideas between Nietzsche and Gor'kij surprising, given the popularity of the former's ideas and the growing number of his followers in Russia at the time. In particular, he stressed the recurrence of the elements of risk, cruelty and loneliness in Gor'kij's stories and explained them away by arguing that Nietzsche's moral and political teachings were too important not to have affected Gor'kij's tramps.

Similarly, the critic compared the inhabitants of Dostoevskij's *Mertvij dom* as well as Raskol'nikov in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* with some of Gor'kij's leading characters. He noted that, like them, Gor'kij's heroes consider themselves special people who have the right to commit crimes. Altogether, he argued that in the two volumes of Gor'kij's work under consideration, strong similarities exist between his heroes and those of Dostoevskij and Nietzsche. For example, he observed that some of the inhabitants of Dostoevskij's *Mertvij dom* are very close to Gor'kij's Čelkaš and Sereža, while Stavrogin, Raskol'nikov and other characters of Dostoevskij bear significant resemblances with Zobar and Larra. Yet, the critic reiterated his belief that the similarity of ideas among Gor'kij, Dostoevskij and Nietzsche was a coincidence and rejected suggestions of conscious attempts by Gor'kij to mirror the ideas of the two better-known writers. What

mattered in all of this for Mixajlovskij was that Gor'kij had joined the ranks of two great thinkers -- Dostoevskij and Nietzsche -- who had worked independently to highlight problems which did not attract the attention of most writers at the time. He praised Gor'kij for the path he chose and hoped that he would devote more attention to the problems he addressed.

While Mixajlovskij acknowledged, like the vast majority of contemporary critics, that Gor'kij was relatively new to the literary scene and pointed to difficulties in making a proper judgement of his world view and literary future, he maintained his trust in his talent, originality and powerful ability to observe. He imagined a number of scenarios for Gor'kij's future as a writer, which included the possibility that his career would be shortlived. Additionally, however, Mixajlovskij observed that Gor'kij's interest in psychological problems, similar to that of Dostoevskij, could give his work a particular relevance. This shared interest, he also argued, could result in an artificial and arbitrary combination of different contemporary issues that would detract form his works.

Moreover, Mixajlovskij detected a worrisome movement towards Decadence in Gor'kij's work. Citing a couple of characters in "Ošibka" who favoured Decadence, Mixajlovskij argued that while Gor'kij would contest the relevance of these words to himself, they nevertheless, served as a source of concern for his future. He insisted that the words provided a certain indication of Gor'kij's own outlook, even if they belonged to two psychologically unbalanced characters.[56]

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[56] It is interesting to note here that, later Ju. Aleksandrovič also observed isolated similarities between Gor'kij and the Decadents in "Radost' žizni. (1897-1903)." However, in that work, which focused on Gor'kij's relationship with the Decadents,

In conclusion, Mixajlovskij reiterated some of the rough edges in Gor'kij's writing. However, he expressed confidence that the inexperienced and still immature writer would succeed in dealing with these shortcomings either by distancing himself from unclear positions or by mastering them. He maintained that only then could there be a proper assessment of Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature.

Mixajlovskij acknowledged that while Gor'kij's intimate knowledge of the world of his heroes cannot be denied, the repetition of motifs, words and even whole phrases from one story to another left a lot to be desired. He expressed concern that Gor'kij not only attributed the same motifs to his real and allegorical tramps, but also to mentally unbalanced people. Mixajlovskij argued that by adopting such an approach, Gor'kij went beyond personal observations to deal with issues of personal preference. He pointed out that this would have been acceptable had the writer absorbed and understood these issues properly and put them into the appropriate images. The critic summed up by saying that the issues Gor'kij dealt with in his short stories did not constitute an organic whole with his personal observations. As a result, he concluded that the author forced his ideas on his characters, thereby producing a series of artistic miscalculations partly attributable to his leanings towards Decadence.

Finally, unlike other contributors to this collection, who concentrated essentially on Gor'kij's tramp figures, Mixajlovskij turned his attention to "Jamarka v Goltve" and

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Aleksandrovič asserted that there was very little real symbolism in Gor'kij's work, capable of raising ordinary every day events to the abstract as there was in the works of Dostoevskij, Čexov and Garšin. See: Ju. Aleksandrovič, *Posle Čexova. Očerk molodoj literatury poslednego desjatiletija 1898-908.* (Moscow: Obščestvennaja pol'za, 1908) 66.

"Skuki radi", two stories which do not deal with tramps. He observed that while "Jamarka v Goltve" does not provide a deep and exhaustive reflection of any particular issue, it is filled with a light and clear humour which is absent in the other stories. He also noted that in addition to its seriousness both in meaning and content, "Skuki radi" is also fuller in its presentation. Mixajlovskij's admiration for the story is evident when he argues that it is impossible for even the sharpest ear to detect any falseness in it, nor can a single word be added or removed from it without destroying its beauty. He pointed out that, unlike other stories where Gor'kij's presence is felt in the text, there is no such involvement in "Skuki radi", where events flow their course and thus make a greater impression on the reader. In this regard, the critic acknowledged that the subtext of Gor'kij's work provides a better picture than the writer's personal attempts at prompting the reader. Additionally, he remarked that if select pages of landscape descriptions like those describing singing scenes in "Toska" were added to Gor'kij's many other strengths we have mentioned earlier, Gor'kij clearly emerges as a powerful artistic force.

Briefly put, Mixajlovskij's extensive study of Gor'kij's short stories and contribution to Russian literature did not deviate from the generally positive opinion of his work expressed by the vast majority of critics. While he highlighted certain weaknesses in Gor'kij's work, his comments generally supported the contemporary positive opinion of Gor'kij. In fact, it can be argued that the attitude of Mixajlovskij and others in pointing to difficulties Gor'kij shared with better-known local and international writers provided supporters of the writer with useful ammunition when it came to defending him against criticisms of some of his more obvious weaknesses.

The opening paragraph of M.O. Men'šikov's "Krasivyj cinizm. (M. Gor'kij. Rasskazy TI, II, III, IV. Spb. 1900)"[57] neatly sums up the general impression contemporary critics had of Gor'kij at the end of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

> Iz glubin narodnyx prišel darovityj pisatel' i srazu pokoril sebe vsju čitajuščuju Rossiju. Vy dogadyvaetes', čto reč' idet o g. Gor'kom: immeno ego knigi rasxodjatsja s ne slixannoju u nas bystrotoju, ego imja peredaetsja iz ust v usta v millionax ugolkov, gde tol'ko tepletsja intelligentnaja žizn'. Kuda by vdal' vy ni poexali, ot Peterburga do Tiflisa i ot Varšavy do Vladivostoka, vy nepremenno vstretite vostoržennyx poklonnikov étogo novogo talanta, -- reže -- xulitelej ego. O g. Gor'kom govorjat, o nem vedut gorjačie spory...[58]

This quotation clearly demonstrates the extent to which Gor'kij's popularity caught on with Russian readers as it reached distant corners, hitherto untouched by intellectual currents. In addition, it mentions the uproar caused in traditional circles by the originality and talent of the young writer.

Given such a positive assessment of Gor'kij's work, it would seem that Men'šikov's comments on Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature would merely follow a common trend in contemporary criticism. On the contrary, he set himself up to probe the reasons that accounted for the quick rise and wide popularity that a writer of Gor'kij's background enjoyed.

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[57] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 181-209. This article was first published as "Kritičeskie zametki. Krasivyj cinizm. M. Gor'kij. Rasskazy. Toma I-IV" in the September issue of *Kn. "Nedelja"*, 212-251. As well, it appears in Men'šikov, Kritičeskie očerki. Tom. II. (St. Petersburg: Trud, 1902) 1-44.

[58] Ibid., 181.

Men'šikov contended that popularity among readers is an indication of a writer's success. Therefore, he pointed out that in order to succeed, a writer requires more than just talent. He also emphasized that more than individual talent, extra-literary factors account very often for the quick rise and popularity of certain writers. In this regard, Men'šikov pointed out that in the past, talented writers had been passed over, because they lacked the extra-literary factors that draw attention to talent.

It is in this light that Men'šikov stressed the importance of an author's biography and its role in promoting his literary success. He argued that while talent remained the essential ingredient in the making of a good writer, it took other non-artistic factors such as timing and place to become famous. As such, Men'šikov stressed that while Gor'kij's popularity was due largely to his talent, his biography was an important contributory factor in promoting his literary image and thus should not be ignored.

Men'šikov regretted the prominent role biography played in making a literary reputation. He pointed out that by the time Gor'kij arrived on the literary scene, his peculiar background had already made him popular. So, this, he claimed, made it difficult for critics to say with any precision whether Gor'kij owed his literary success primarily to his talent and skills as a writer or to his popularity as a public figure.

Men'šikov observed that Gor'kij's appearance on the literary scene had significant implications for Russian literature and society as a whole since it brought to the fore the hitherto ignored side of Russian intellectual life. He maintained that Gor'kij's stories helped expose this area of Russian life and also dispelled the long-held view that tramps and their like deserved to be punished for breaking the social contract. The critic observed

that Gor'kij elevated his heroes in the public eye, allowing them to show off their life of scandal to the rest of society. To him, Gor'kij represented a new voice which highlighted the life and concerns of a largely neglected sector of Russian society. Moreover, his characters symbolized a challenge to traditional Russian intellectual life and embodied a rude intrusion into Russian literature, which until then, he believed, had always been more selective in its characterization.

Men'šikov pointed out that because of the broad appeal of Gor'kij's treatment of then-neglected sectors of Russian society, there was rivalry among different and sometimes opposing groups to claim him as their own. For example, he showed how Korolenko and the *Narodniki* "discovered" and popularized him as they recognized in his peasant characters examples of the quick way capitalism destroyed village patriarchy, while emphasizing the threat liberated peasants posed to society and civilization as a whole. Similarly, he mentioned that the Marxists, who called Gor'kij "vožd' vremeni", regarded him as the one who drew attention to the proletariat both as victim of and commodity for capitalism.

It is in light of the above that Men'šikov credited Gor'kij with being the first Russian writer to focus attention on the people of the future. He also praised him as a person who valued their freedom and was willing to confront capitalism. The critic argued that the conflicting claims on Gor'kij not only confirmed his talent and skills as a writer, but also spoke of his importance for Russian literature.

Like most of his contemporaries, Men'šikov argued that it appeared that Gor'kij's literary output sufficed for critics and readers alike to speak of his creative abilities.

Nevertheless, he warned that it was still premature to attempt a definitive assessment of his impact on Russian literary life. For example, Men'šikov admitted that Gor'kij deserved to be called a good and promising writer, judging from the first two volumes of his collected short stories. At the same time, he pointed out that volumes III and IV proved to be less fulfilling. Men'šikov attributed the weaknesses in the latter volumes to complacency and over-indulgence on the part of Gor'kij. He attributed these to the overwhelming praise from critics and over-enthusiasm from Gor'kij's publishers, as well as to the writer's inability to be selective in the choice of his material for publication. The critic claimed that less than adequate finances had forced Gor'kij to include stories of a lower quality in subsequent collections of his work. He emphasized that while Gor'kij had apparently reached the peak of his popularity by this time, the author's literary career had only just begun. Men'šikov stressed that Gor'kij needed time to allow his talent to develop and unfold, given the importance of practical experience for his literary career.

Commenting on references to Gor'kij as an impressionist ("razmašistyj impressionist"), Men'šikov noted that, paradoxically, impressionism constituted both the author's main strength and a weakness. Remarking that the secret of art is moderation, while the hallmark of literary impressionism lies in its ungovernability (as it seeks to break boundaries), the critic argued that impressionism poses a particular danger for artists since it easily reveals the weaknesses of less talented and inexperienced writers. It is significant that most of the difficulties Men'šikov associated with impressionism, which included *oblagorožennaja lož'*, *pripodnjataja deistvitel'nost'* and *karikaturnye čerty*,[59]

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[59] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 189.

became commonplace criticisms levelled against Gor'kij in later years. Not surprisingly, Men'šikov criticized Gor'kij for lack of moderation and accused him of abusing both the economy of feeling ("ékonomija čuvstva") and the economy of thought ("ékonomija mysli"). To this end, the critic wrote: "Živoj temperament g. Gor'kogo pridaet ego rasskazam xarakter strastnyj, jarkij, sočnyj, koloritnyj, i éto, konečno, dostoinstvo, no mera ego, k sožaleniju ne vsegda vyderžina, i naš avtor vpadaet koe-gde v vyčurnost', v kriklivuju, xolodnuju žestikuljaciju slov."[60]

This harsh comment relates to Gor'kij's authorial interventions to his work, and it reflected a growing feeling among his contemporaries that he had become too obtrusive in his stories. This, of course, serves to confirm accusations of authorial interference levelled against Gor'kij earlier by both Tolstoj and Čexov.

In addition, Men'šikov argued that "neuravnovešennosti mysli", which he described as "...naklonnosti k refleksii, k besplodnoj umstvennoj sumatoxe tak nazyvaemyx intelligentnyx ljudej, otorvannyx ot organičeskogo byta"[61] was an even greater danger to Gor'kij than "neuravnovešennosti čuvstva". It is in light of this that he accused him of bookishness -- a charge which became more frequent with time. Even more importantly, he picked up on the writer's tendentiousness and observed that already in his early stories (both good and weak) signs of the artist began to be obscured by a strong tendency to moralize as well as argue with the reader.

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[60] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 189.

[61] Ibid., 192.

Similarly, Men'šikov remarked that neither the language nor philosophy of Gor'kij's characters was commensurate with their background. It is important to note that apart from stressing the tendentious nature of his work, the critic also emphasized that it increasingly lacked the major elements of good art and gradually became an instrument of moralizing and propaganda.

Yet, in spite of these criticisms, Men'šikov praised the author for his ability to observe and argued that this made him a truly strong writer. For this reason, he was willing to forgive the author's initial mistakes as he observed that even great writers like Turgenev and Tolstoj experienced similar difficulties in their formative years. Further, he pointed out that Gor'kij's real talent had not yet found its true direction. Menšikov urged Gor'kij to deal with issues that were familiar to him, and warned him to avoid debating in his works since that resulted in journalism and propaganda. He also pleaded with Gor'kij to act as envoy of the little known underground world to the rest of society.

Regarding Nietzschean elements, Men'šikov argued that Gor'kij's stories had already been permeated by the cynicism of the German philosopher. The critic illustrated the extent to which these negative tendencies had penetrated Gor'kij's work by citing "Moj sputnik", a story in which a humble man, willing to help his travelling companion, is abused by the latter, who poses as a wealthy Georgian prince. Men'šikov compared Gor'kij's philosophy with that of the *Narodniki* and noted that in contrast to the latter group who tried to emphasize the good in people, especially the peasant, Gor'kij sought out the bad side of people and when he found the beast in them, he seemed to rejoice in this discovery by giving it his sympathies.

The sharp contrast the critic drew between Gor'kij and his immediate predecessors should be kept in mind. Men'šikov found that Gor'kij disengaged himself from the dominant approach of the preceding decades which had tried to remodel the Russian peasant. He noted that Gor'kij not only gave a faithful picture of the peasant which showed all the beastly elements that differentiated him from people in higher society, but even emphasised the merit of that distinctness in favour of the peasant. In this regard, the critic observed that Gor'kij praised what was generally regarded as repugnant behaviour among the tramps.

It is against this background that Men'šikov criticized Gor'kij's pursuit of the beastly and bellicose sides of man in "Pesnja o sokole", but admired the setting of the allegorical flight to the heavens. In particular, he disapproved of demonic characters usurping the traditional role played by angels in such flights and rejected Gor'kij's allegorical portrayal of birds such as "utki" and "kuropatki", whose downfall the petrel sought, as tyrannical. The critic expressed disappointment at the wide acclaim the song was accorded and wondered why it appealed particularly to the youth and intellectuals despite its false nature and weaknesses. He contended that the song owed its popularity to the prominence of Nietzsche's ideas at the time.

Nevertheless, Men'šikov pointed out that differences in thought existed between Gor'kij and Nietzsche. Of special significance, he stressed the non-folk origin of the latter and observed, for example, that the ideas expressed in "Pesnja o sokole" did not reflect the thoughts of ordinary people, whom, it was often claimed Gor'kij's characters represented. It was in view of this that the critic argued that although Gor'kij's artistic

talent grew with the years, his moral stance remained unchanged.

Yet, in comparing Gor'kij with other writers of the time, Men'šikov asserted that Gor'kij surpassed his peers in many ways, because he experienced a particular way of life to which others were not exposed. It is in this regard i.e. in respect to Gor'kij's knowledge of his characters and their environment that he put him in the company of Turgenev and Tolstoj. Above all, Men'šikov argued that Gor'kij's creative work revealed his inner self and he noted with satisfaction that in spite of his lack of education, the young writer had been able to put himself on the same level as contemporary high-society writers.

Notwithstanding Men'šikov's high opinion of Gor'kij, he observed, paradoxically, that the writer's apparent success had a negative effect on his literary output. This, he claimed was because his work had begun to show signs of being influenced by books and journals. He noted that, going through Gor'kij's work, one is left with the impression that a strong and powerful talent had fallen prey to fashionable jargon. In particular, Men'šikov regretted that so many of the conversations in Gor'kij's work appeared forced.

Further to this, he argued that Gor'kij's language represented, at best, only a segment of the ordinary people and did not differ significantly from that of his contemporaries. He disputed the claim by some that Gor'kij introduced a new language into Russian literature and argued that other writers of the same origin used similar popular jargon in their work. Men'šikov complained that Gor'kij's language was dominated by journalese and predicted that verbosity, propaganda and journalistic usage

would be weaknesses in his future.

Men'šikov could not have been more right in his predictions, as these three elements became major drawbacks in Gor'kij's work. It is significant to note that Gor'kij himself, while increasingly aware of these weaknesses, appeared unable or unwilling to deal with them. Indeed, he explained them away by accepting them as inevitable. As for Gor'kij's supporters, they attributed these weaknesses to his experiences and particularly to those of his characters.

In fact, even Men'šikov, in his closing remarks, indicated that it was probably unfair to expect Gor'kij to use ordinary language since his characters were not ordinary people. He argued that Gor'kij's heroes were removed both from the intelligentsia and the ordinary people. As such, he stressed that their cynicism was all too natural and need not be seen as an influence of Nietzschean philosophy. Instead, Men'šikov claimed that this cynicism was a product of Gor'kij's real life experiences. He reminded readers that the similarity of thought among Gor'kij's heroes and contemporary intellectuals reflected a widespread phenomenon which was not confined to Russia. No wonder, therefore, that in his final attempt to define the writer, Men'šikov added to the speculation among certain critics that Gor'kij had not come from among the common people.

Irrespective of doubts about Gor'kij's origins and some serious reservations about his writing skills, Men'šikov recognized the author's creative potential and exhorted the public, and critics especially, to pay particular attention to him. Thus, it would appear that while Men'šikov was less infatuated with Gor'kij's work and adopted a more critical and literary approach to him, his reservations were neither that many nor serious enough to

amount to condemnation. Yet, it is clear that the critic had identified some of the major weaknesses that would follow Gor'kij throughout his entire career. It is, in part, for this reason that Men'šikov's contribution to the debate on Gor'kij's reception in contemporary Russia is of great significance.

Agreeing with Tolstoj that the greater the presence of a writer's personality in his work, the more attractive it is to readers, Vladimir Bocjanovskij, in his article "V pogone za smyslom žizni,"[62] tried to explain Gor'kij's popularity at a time when contemporary Russian literature had allegedly stagnated. He pointed out that most contemporary literary works lacked the soul of the artist in them and were unable to attract the interest of readers. Emphasizing the importance of a writer's biography to his success, Bocjanovskij cited Veresaev as a successful writer, who, in spite of a lack of artistic talent, exploited his popularity with the public to propagate his message for change in Russian society. Bocjanovskij suggested that the tendency among contemporary readers and critics to identify the writer with his heroes probably accounted for Gor'kij's popularity and subsequent success.

Similarly, Bocjanovskij argued that Gor'kij's ability to follow the Russian literary traditions of the nineteenth century and his particular handling of the theme of the individual gave his work a special appeal. The critic observed that while both Čexov and Veresaev preceded Gor'kij in the treatment of this theme, similar to the way Gor'kij handled it, the individual found fuller physical and artistic expression in the latter's work. For example, Bocjanovskij pointed to the quest for individual freedom as a major motif

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[62] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 161-180. This article was first published a year earlier in *Vestnik vsemirnoj istorii*, 8: 161-179.

in Gor'kij's work and observed that in their search for the meaning and purpose of life, the writer's characters were not satisfied with what engaged the minds and energies of the average person. Bocjanovskij pointed out that because the heroes choices were limited, they tended to isolate themselves from society. As a result, the critic considered them a variant of Turgenev's "superfluous people".

On the technical level, Bocjanovskij credited Gor'kij with the ability to render setting vividly in very few words, seascapes, in particular. He noted that the writer displayed similar strengths in his presentation of real life situations and compared his depiction of singers and singing scenes favourably with those of Turgenev -- another identification of Gor'kij with the Russian classics. For example, Bocjanovskij cited "Pevcy" as another successful attempt by Gor'kij to bring his literary characters to life. The critic observed that the reader literally hears the songs and feels the mood of the singers. This served for Bocjanovskij not only as a demonstration of the power of Gor'kij's talent, but also as proof of the writer's ability to use sound and colour adroitly. He claimed that when these qualities are added to Gor'kij's in-depth knowledge of his characters, there is little doubt that he is a powerful and talented writer to which every page of his work bears testimony.

The above notwithstanding, the critic still refused to credit Gor'kij's heroes with any high ideals, arguing instead that their energies are directed at dangerous thoughts and ventures. In particular, Bocjanovskij pointed to their rich fantasy and flights of imagination and spoke of a certain romanticism among them. The critic claimed that the main motivation in the conduct of Gor'kij's characters was their desire to be independent

and self-reliant. He pointed out that before Gor'kij no Russian writer had come this far in advocating unlimited individual liberties and he argued that this explained why reactions to Gor'kij's work were so mixed among his contemporaries. For example, he noted that the hostility shown by Mixail Alekseevič Protopopov (1861-1933), a journalist friend of Korolenko, toward Gor'kij was a result of his rejection of absolute freedom.

It would appear from the arguments above, that the timing of Gor'kij's short stories worked in his favour, especially because they were published at a time when biography became an important factor in literary considerations. It was, however, the writer's pursuit of the theme of the individual in the tradition of nineteenth century Russian literature that put his name permanently on the cultural map of Russia. In particular, Gor'kij's approach to the pursuit of individual liberty was a novelty in Russian literature and an important contributory factor in his success. As well, suggestions that Gor'kij's work ranked above those of his peers and compared favourably with some of the great names of the past century leave little doubt about Bocjanovskij's high regard for the writer.

A. Skabičevskij, a critic of note who wrote extensively on Gor'kij,[63] also contributed to the debate on Gor'kij's rise to stardom in the last decade of the nineteenth

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[63] Other works in which Skabičevskij discussed Gor'kij's work and their impact on Russian cultural life included *Istorija russkoj literatury. 1848-1898.* 4th edition (St. Petersburg: 1900), *Sočinenija v dvux tomax.* Tom I (St. Petersburg: 1903) and in a contributory article in F. Brockhaus and I. Efron ed. *Enciklopedičeskij slovar'* (St. Petersburg: 1907). In these works, Skabičevskij underlined the originality of Gor'kij's oeuvre and reaffirmed his conviction that the writer would occupy a leading role in contemporary Russian literature.

century. He observed in "M. Gor'kij, *Očerki i rasskazy*"[64], which focused on the writer's early work, that Gor'kij was first and foremost a poet of the tramps. Skabičevskij repeated the view held among his contemporaries that in many ways Gor'kij reminded readers of Levitov, who had written about tramps previously. However, he was quick to mention that the views of the two writers were diametrically opposed. For example, the critic observed that while Levitov was pessimistic about the fate of his heroes, Gor'kij had always remained optimistic. Additionally, Skabičevskij rated Gor'kij higher than his predecessor in terms of subject matter and clarity of presentation. As well, he considered Gor'kij very objective. In this regard, he observed that if Levitov's works were incomplete, lyrical and verbose, Gor'kij's short stories were complete in themselves, had dramatic plots and were properly and harmoniously developed. Even more importantly for Gor'kij's later career, the critic argued that, contrary to the view that art and tendentiousness are incompatible, Gor'kij's work demonstrated that the two can enhance each other.

Nevertheless, Skabičevskij added his voice to those of his contemporaries when he reiterated that Gor'kij showed a deep attachment to his heroes. The critic observed that this resulted in Gor'kij idealizing his characters somewhat, putting his own thoughts in their mouths. Skabičevskij observed a certain closeness between Gor'kij's peasants and those found in the comic works of Nikolaj Ostrovskij. To Gor'kij's credit, however, Skabičevskij observed that the utterances of his characters were not affected by current theoretical musings. In this respect, Skabičevskij's statements are similar to ones made

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[64] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 106-121.

by Mixajlovskij and other notable critics of the day. This had the ultimate effect of buttressing Gor'kij's originality by minimizing external influences on him.

Finally, Skabičevskij cited excerpts from Gor'kij's short stories to support his general observations and described "Čelkaš" as one of the pearls of Russian literature because of its poetic beauty, drama and subject matter. The critic also praised the writer's ability to reveal moving drama in everyday events. Not unlike his peers, however, Skabičevskij's comments on Gor'kij's place in Russian literature were perfunctory and brief. Not only does the critic not set himself the task of judging Gor'kij's legacy in Russian literature at the time, he does not mention the writer's future at all in the article. More significantly for Gor'kij's image, Skabičevskij endorsed the prevailing idea that he was an objective writer; this even after he admitted that the author was close to his main characters and often idealized them. The critic explained away his concerns about tendentiousness and authorial interferences by asserting that the author avoided theoretical musings in his work. Like the majority of his peers in the literary community, Skabičevskij regarded Gor'kij's personal involvement in some of the events he wrote about as sufficient grounds to label him as an objective writer.

Moreover, Skabičevskij's comparisons of Gor'kij with Levitov instead of the main giants of contemporary Russian literature, as was the case with most of his contemporaries, probably implied that he did not yet think very highly of the young writer. Nevertheless, given the importance of Skabičevskij's voice in contemporary Russian criticism, it is significant that he did not pounce on particular weaknesses in Gor'kij's work as such an attack could have offered critics ammunition against the writer.

While Andreevič (Evgenij Solov'ev) did not pretend to present an exhaustive analysis and characterization of Gor'kij's writing in what is the first full-length book on the writer's work[65], he drew attention to Gor'kij's literary achievements. Andreevič pointed out that though Gor'kij's rapid success came to many as a surprise, it was neither easy nor accidental. Andreevič attributed Gor'kij's meteoric rise in popularity to the author's ability, unlike any of his contemporaries, to touch the hearts of his readers. Even more significantly, Andreevič argued, much like Tolstoj in his observations concerning Gor'kij's popularity at the turn of the century in Russia and abroad, that Gor'kij's success was a result of his ability to speak about contemporary issues that interested his readers.[66]

Appealing to general rules of literary criticism, Andreevič dealt specifically with selected aspects of Gor'kij's work. This approach provided him with the opportunity to declare a literary revolution following upon the period of materialism and the great trust in the power of knowledge that characterized the 1860s and 1870s. Andreevič saw this as being followed by the period of moral reawakening as represented by Tolstoj. Andreevič argued that the preceding period of moralism created a certain fear in which people lived under the shadow of the unknown. He observed that with the introduction

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[65] Andreevič, *Kniga o Maksime Gor'kom i A.P.Čexove* (St. Petersburg: 1900) 259 pages. Other full-length books published in the same year on Gor'kij's short stories included Volynskij A. (Flekser A.L.) *Bor'ba za idealism. Kritičeskie stat'i.* (St. Petersburg: N. Molostov, 1900), Aleksandrovskij T., *Maksim Gor'kij i ego sočinenija. Publičnye lekcii.* (Kiev: 1900) and Batjuškov, F.D., *Kritičeskie očerki i zametki.* (St. Petersburg: 1900).

[66] Xoroš, "Tolstoj o Gor'kom.", Na literaturnom Postu, May 1928: 27.

of the tramp character, who announced the existence of light and hope, Gor'kij's work dragged society out of this situation. Similarly, he claimed that Gor'kij opened his readers' eyes to the danger that surrounded them once they submitted to too many rules and regulations. He insisted that as a result of this, the idea of freedom caught on easily with the reader and probably explains Gor'kij's popularity with contemporary readers.

Better than any of his contemporaries, the critic traced the trend that Gor'kij represented to Saltykov-Ščedrin and G. Uspenskij. He compared Gor'kij's tramps with those of Gleb and Nikolaj Uspenskij and credited these two writers with laying the groundwork for this literary type. However, Andreevič argued that, before Gor'kij, something appeared to be missing in the way the tramp was presented. He claimed that it was Gor'kij, who first gave this character an individual identity, notwithstanding some shared features. In addition, Andreevič pointed out that contemporary conditions had created the tramp character and had helped to make people sympathetic to him. Nevertheless, he argued that Gor'kij's style was the single most important reason for his success. In particular, the critic stressed the significance of Gor'kij's *objective portrayal of the characters* in his work and pointed out that the author neither pitied nor defended them. Andreevič also claimed that Gor'kij's approach was not only new for both Russian and world literature, but that its particular coloration also accounted for the general appeal of the writer's work to readers.

Furthermore, Andreevič pointed out that Gor'kij gave each of his characters the opportunity to display their best side in different situations. The critic observed that tramps saw a special beauty in their ability to choose a life of wandering in spite of the

difficulties that accompany it. He reiterated the discomfort of Gor'kij's heroes both in the city and in the country and concluded that conditions, rather than place, determine their happiness. Andreevič described as unrealistic their demand for absolute freedom and, like others before him, found romanticism in this demand. As a result, the critic accused Gor'kij of colouring events in his work and argued that the romanticism of these characters was so great and so pervasive in many other early stories that they were unreal and could only be seen as a symbolic expression of an elemental search for absolute freedom.

Yet, it is important to recognize that while Andreevič criticized the romantic nature of Gor'kij's characters and pointed out that the writer himself may not have believed in their philosophy, he admitted that there was something attractive and provocative in them. He cited "Makar Čudra" and "Pesnja o sokole" as typical romantic stories and pointed especially to common typical features like strong passions, proud souls and the unity of life and death. Similarly, he pointed to the pervasive romanticism in Gor'kij's nature descriptions, summing up the romanticism therein as follows:

> Étot romantizm -- lučšij i glavnij istočnik mirovoj poézii. Konečno on est' u Gor'kogo: ego daže mnogo i v častnostjax, i v obščem nastroenii, svodjaščemsja v konce koncov k tomu, čto on poet slavu bezumstvu xrabryx. Gordynja svoego "Ja", melanxolija, ne izbežnaja pri vide xolopskoj i truslivoj žizni, ljubov' k prirode i čutkoe ponimanie ee -- vot istinnye osnovanija togo romantizma, o kotorom ja govorju.[67]

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[67] Andreevič, 1900: 53.

It is noteworthy that Andreevič's appraisal of Gor'kij's work summarized the main elements in the debate on Gor'kij's place in contemporary Russian life and culture. Not surprisingly, Andreevič, who shared Gor'kij's vision of a socially engaged literature, stressed the utilitarian aspects of Gor'kij's work as he spoke of the introduction of light and hope by the author's tramps. Equally significant, Andreevič attributed Gor'kij's success to his ability to respond to popular needs of the time and pointed out in addition that the road to success was for the author neither easy nor accidental. Andreevič's remarks have to be considered in the context of the on-going ideological struggles in Russia at the time, in particular against the background of the fact that the critic was not impartial. It can be argued, therefore, that Andreevič's desire to see Gor'kij succeed must have motivated his rather upbeat assessment of the author.

Andreevič admitted, nevertheless, that Gor'kij's characters take concrete poetic forms at times as in the case of Zobar and Mal'va or with personalities in "Byvšie ljudi". At the same time, he stressed that Gor'kij modified his characters by deliberately selecting those features that suit the mood of his tramps and provide a good picture of them to the reader. More importantly, Andreevič stressed that apart from the raw talent of the writer, there were other factors which helped to draw readers to him. For example, the critic pointed to the popularity of Nietzsche's teachings at the time and stressed their role in facilitating Gor'kij's work. Andreevič observed that Nietzsche's denial of the existence of God and his subsequent reliance on the superman appealed to contemporary readers. He also claimed that contemporary Russian culture enhanced Gor'kij's success as industrialization and attendant urbanization helped prepare conditions for his *bosjak*

characters -- especially in the still prevalent atmosphere of Russia's *Oblomovščina.*

It is probably against this background that Andreevič observed the enthusiasm of the *intelligentsia* for Gor'kij's characters. He claimed that they were attracted by these lowly characters because of the frankness of their creator. Andreevič argued that by being direct and straight to the point, Gor'kij had not only been able to make heroes out of ordinary people, but he had also succeeded in stimulating and sustaining the reader's interest. In this regard, he praised Gor'kij for his daring and ability to deal with issues that interested him without being distracted or influenced by external pressures. The critic observed that Gor'kij did not hide his admiration for his characters as he rated them equal to and somehow above other members of society. Andreevič commended Gor'kij's successful use of this tactic. He also stated that Gor'kij's strong talent had merely aroused the interest of the reading public in a subject that they were already prepared for.

Andreevič also defended Gor'kij against criticisms of intellectualism and western philosophical influences and argued that Gor'kij was primarily a lyrical poet who sought answers to the meaning of life. He noted that the importance of Gor'kij's work was not in whether his heroes were real or unreal, but in the opportunity they provided readers to observe the human soul as these characters acted upon their spontaneous protests, their unwillingness to accept conditions of "unnatural" human existence and their fight against narrow-mindedness.

In spite of the critic's general admiration for Gor'kij and support for the philosophical and ideological positions in his work, like other contemporaries, he observed that Gor'kij's very recent appearance on the Russian literary scene was still too

early for any definitive assessment of the writer's contribution to Russian culture. Nevertheless, he argued that his short stories alone were sufficient to guarantee him a place in Russian literature. He stressed in particular that the importance of Gor'kij's contribution was underlined by the freshness of his voice and the timely nature of his work. It is as a result of this that the critic conveyed the following personal impressions of Gor'kij's work:

> Lično ja ne znaju ničego privlekatel'nogo i osvežajuščego, osobenno kogda čelovek umeet tak krasivo vyskazyvat' svoi mysli i svoe nastroenie, kak Gor'kij. Čto by on ni pisal, ni govoril -- v nem čuvstvuetsja sil'naja literaturnaja ličnost': ego "Ja" zapečatleno na každom slove, vyšedšem iz-pod ego pera, -- éto "Ja", o kotorom zabyli daže i dumat' bol'šinstvo pisatelej našego vremeni.[68]

It is noteworthy that Andreevič's appraisal of Gor'kij's work summarized the main elements in the debate on Gor'kij's place in contemporary Russian life and cultureNot surprisingly, Andreevič, who shared Gor'kij's vision of a socially engaged literature, stressed the utilitarian aspects of Gor'kij's work as he spoke of the introduction of light and hope by the author's tramps. Equally significant, Andreevič attributed Gor'kij's success to his ability to respond to popular needs of the time and pointed out in addition that the road to success was neither easy nor accidental for the author. Andreevič's remarks have to be considered in the context of the on-going ideological struggles in Russia at the time, in particular against the background that the critic was not impartial to Gor'kij's fate. It can be argued, therefore, that Andreevič's desire to see Gor'kij succeed must have motivated his rather upbeat assessment of the author.

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[68] Andreevič, 1900: 54.

Another important contribution to the debate about the significance of Gor'kij's early work to his image was T. Aleksandrovskij's book which appeared in 1901. Focusing on Gor'kij among a growing number of young and talented writers,[69] Aleksandrovskij expressed his immense admiration for the writer and observed that the publication of three volumes of short stories in two and a half years (which were reprinted three times in large press runs) had made him the subject of much literary debate. Aleksandrovskij observed that this resulted in the publication of several large volumes of critical material and numerous frequent gatherings held to discuss Gor'kij's work.

To help reveal the special literary qualities of Gor'kij's art, Aleksandrovskij focused his attention on five important questions. These included: Gor'kij's stance as a writer; the source of his talent; aspects of life portrayed in his work and from what perspective; the subject matter of his stories; and lastly, the meaning and overall importance of the writer's work. The critic did this by combining a look at his biography with a brief survey of some of the writer's stories, which he believed embodied a poetic expression of the main principles dear to him. He justified this approach by arguing that a writer's total life experiences, which include his intellectual and spiritual development, help determine his world view and relations with other people.

In addition, Aleksandrovskij observed that the general outlook of a poet provides the prism through which he looks at the world. In order to obtain a proper assessment of a literary work, a critic must therefore be able to differentiate between what has been observed or imagined and poetic images which might differ from reality under the

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[69] T. Aleksandrovskij, *Maksim Gor'kij i ego sočinenija*. (Kiev: M.M. Fix, 1901) 80 pages.

influence of the writer's world view. To this end, Aleksandrovskij commented on the philosophical foundations of Gor'kij's work and stressed that, unlike most Russian writers, the latter was not influenced during his early career by the teachings and philosophies current among his colleagues. While the critic attributed this to Gor'kij's lack of formal education, he noted that with time, the writer became familiar with some of these doctrines. He asserted that they affected Gor'kij negatively, for he was unable to integrate them properly into his real life experiences. Aleksandrovskij blamed Gor'kij for failing to combine satisfactorily what he learned from books with his personal experiences. This, he claimed, resulted in a somewhat unclear world view and detracted from the general import of Gor'kij's work:

> ...obščee mirovozrenie Gor'kogo, v nekotoryx svoix častjax, poražaet kakoj-to tumannost'ju i neopredelennost'ju. Vidno, čto uveroval v tot ili inoj princip, no on ne znaet, kak ego primenit' v žizni, ne predstavljaet ego sebe vo vsej polnote i zakončennosti; princip étot poka ešče ne srossja v odno celoe s ličnostju Gor'kogo, ne ovladel im nastol'ko, čtoby rukovodit' im v ponimanii žizni, v ocenke ee javlenij s odnoj opredelennoj točki zrenija.[70]

At the same time, however, in accounting for Gor'kij's success, the critic drew attention to circumstances in Gor'kij's life which brought the writer close to the Russian underworld and provided him with an inner knowledge and understanding of a way of life that had either been neglected or under-represented in Russian letters. Allegedly because of Gor'kij's personal interaction with the inhabitants of the underworld, he had first hand knowledge of their spiritual needs, aspirations, sympathies and antipathies which were inaccessible to the vast majority of contemporary writers. Aleksandrovskij further

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[70] Aleksandrovskij, 1901: 8.

attributed the success of Gor'kij's work to the photographic nature of his descriptions, resulting from the author's rare experiences.

Not unlike many of his contemporaries, Aleksandrovskij saw biographical elements in Gor'kij's work and indicated that his characters were a poetic expression of himself in their struggle to reach for the best in difficult conditions. While the critic noted the pivotal role of the struggle for a better world in Gor'kij's work, he also pointed out his pessimism inasmuch as the writer was neither certain of the whereabouts of the better world nor of the means to get there.

In furtherance of this argument, Aleksandrovskij turned to the subject of Gor'kij's stories and objected to attempts by certain critics to confine the writer to only a part of his experience by defining him exclusively as a writer about tramps. While he acknowledged that Gor'kij's talent and originality in depicting the tramp figure had made him almost synonymous with the latter, he refused to regard him as a single-issue writer. Instead, he pointed to other areas and experiences in his stories that go beyond the tramp character and suggested that only a review of all the subjects in his work could yield a faithful overall assessment. To this end, Aleksandrovskij analyzed some of the stories, including those which contributed most to Gor'kij's popularity.

Focusing primarily on stories about tramps and similar characters, Aleksandrovskij divided the protagonists into two distinct groups -- those that originate from among ordinary people and those from the intelligentsia. While he remarked that much of Gor'kij's work is populated by members of the first group, he argued that the second was better depicted because the writer understood and defined their feelings and mood better.

He explained that the peculiar behaviour of Gor'kij's tramps was due mainly to two closely related elements -- "toska" and "bezpokojstvo" (uneasiness) -- that set them apart from the average person. He directed attention to the near unanimous pursuit of freedom and liberty among Gor'kij's characters and observed that in most cases "toska" appears to be an innate feeling that fuels the desire for freedom and a life of free will.

Yet, the critic pointed out that Gor'kij did not always show the motivations for a life of wandering among his heroes and he claimed that apart from the singular case of "Suprugi Orlovy", where the writer provided sufficient explanation for the circumstances leading to Orlov's decision to embark on a wandering life, he is, in the volumes under discussion, at best, limited to generalizations. And, indeed, he often remains silent on the matter. Aleksandrovskij compared Gor'kij's characters with the "superfluous men" of classical Russian literature and argued that, like them, they were unable to find useful avenues for their energies under contemporary conditions. He pointed to the spiritual emptiness of Gor'kij's characters and argued that by pursuing selfish and individual interests, they became more secluded from the rest of society.

Similarly, Aleksandrovskij observed that while the vast majority of these heroes harboured a general hatred for people in general, the more rounded ones showed a clear dislike for peasants in particular, whom they regarded as lazy and dependent on others. On the other hand, however, Aleksandrovskij pointed out that Gor'kij's characters are eager to find genuine answers to the meaning of life and he noted that rather than believe that surrounding conditions are to blame for their woes, they hold themselves completely responsible for their destiny. The critic saw in this the source of their aspiration for

independence, their love for freedom, their thirst for the unusual and their desire to subjugate others to their authority. Aleksandrovskij concluded, based on these features, that Gor'kij's characters are more or less complex variants of the same personality.

Aleksandrovskij went on to link Gor'kij's characters with the author's personal psychology and argued that while Gor'kij may have met the type of tramp he describes in his stories, his own subjectivism accounts more for the portraits we see in his work than a mirroring of reality. He claimed that, in part, Gor'kij transformed his heroes to suit his own world view. The critic likened this approach to that of Byron, Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj, who, he claimed, took a one-sided look at the world and the nature of man and then turned to themselves to create a character that was uniquely the author's own. Aleksandrovskij contended that Gor'kij belonged to this group of "subjective creators" as each of his characters reflected an integral part of himself. He stressed the similarities among Gor'kij's characters and emphasized the closeness of their world view with the author's. Subsequently, Aleksandrovskij accused Gor'kij of falsely representing real tramps and argued that, while it is possible to recognize elements of real life in Gor'kij's stories, his personal mood and convictions dominate the stories under consideration.

It is important, however, that Aleksandrovskij added a disclaimer to his characterization of Gor'kij's tramps. He did so by observing that while they may not square up entirely with their real life counterparts, it would be wrong to dismiss them as completely unreal. Instead, he argued that Gor'kij's depiction of literary tramps is yet another phase in a well-established literary order that can be traced to Byron and Chateaubriand. Admittedly, Aleksandrovskij acknowledged that while Gor'kij failed to

show sufficiently the changing conditions which resulted in the transformation of his characters, he contributed significantly to explaining the tramp phenomenon and deserved to be praised for that. Even more significantly, by putting Gor'kij in the company of renowned writers such as those mentioned above, contemporary critics and readers were likely to react more favourably to him. This was particularly so for the Russian context, where he could be seen to be a continuer of the traditions established and fostered by Puškin and Lermontov and cherished by most, if not all, Russians.

In another development, Aleksandrovskij admitted that while it was difficult to ignore claims that Gor'kij's work represented a novelty in Russian literature, the long existence of the *bosjak* theme in Russian literature and more recently in the works of Levitov, Korolenko and G. Uspenskij proved there was nothing new in his work. However, the critic conceded that none of his predecessors achieved the mastery he had attained in the depiction of tramp life.

As noted, Aleksandrovskij went a step farther than most of his contemporaries who had confined themselves to the tramp character, to comment on stories that do not deal with that character. Aleksandrovskij observed that Gor'kij drew attention to the plight of poor and depraved people, who lacked even the most basic joys of life. In such works, he noted that Gor'kij succeeded in attracting the sympathy of readers to his heroes by not hiding their defects. While he remarked that Gor'kij expressed sympathy for his characters in isolated instances, he claimed that he did so in a natural and sincere manner. Above all, he argued that the writer kept to reality and depicted the lives of these depraved people so faithfully that many readers were deeply touched by his work.

It is with a view to illustrating Gor'kij's objectivity in depicting his characters that Aleksandrovskij cited "Ded Arxip i Len'ka" and noted that besides showing the negative elements of Ded Arxip as a liar and a thief, Gor'kij also presented the other side of the old man and made it possible for readers to forgive him. For example, he observed that while the writer showed that the old man acknowledged his crime and the divine punishment that awaited him, he was prepared to put morality aside in order to secure a livelihood for his grandson. Aleksandrovskij praised the story for its truthfulness and clarity, the artful and masterly presentation of its characters, the superb choice of subject and its beautiful nature scenes. In sum, he found it an artistic pearl which has the effect of rousing deep sympathies in readers.

In addition, Aleksandrovskij pointed out that Gor'kij revealed his immense ability to engage in deep psychological analysis in "Družki" and "Odnaždy osen'ju". In particular, he praised Gor'kij's ability to show the suffering of his characters while demonstrating that, despite their tremendous pain, they hold important human values. Similarly, the critic called "Na plotax" a great narrative achievement and credited Gor'kij with the ability to present his subject matter in as little space as possible. He expressed delight at the originality of the work and pointed, especially, to Gor'kij's tremendous ability to bring to life an array of living characters with a few strokes of the brush. Aleksandrovskij's satisfaction with and admiration for the brevity, precision and beauty of this story can be seen in the following quotation:

> Na kakix-nibud' 18 straničkax avtor daet nam i jarkuju, rel'efnuju kartinu letnej noči na reke v otdel'nyx ee momentax, i vypuklye, točno iz mramora izvajannye četyre figury dejstvujuščix lic. Inym iz nix on vlagaet v usta tol'ko po neskol'ko fraz da kommentiruet ix reči i deistvija

> mimoletnymi zamečanijami, no -- takova uže sila ego vydajuščegosja xudožestvennogo tvorčestva -- pered nami, kak živye stojat éti lica so vsemi otličnymi čertami svoej natury i žizneponimanija. Nevol'no poražaemsja udivitel'noj sposobnosti avtora dvumja-tremja štrixami nabrosat' celuju kartinu prirody ili otdel'nogo xaraxtera, do takoj stepeni cel'nye i zakončennye, čto o nix už ničego novogo nel'zja skazat'. Tak immeno obrisovany v rasskaze "Na plotax", krome samogo Mitrja, ego otec, polnaja žizn' Silan Petrovič, žadnaja žit' arka, žena Mitrja, rabotnik Sergej. Poprobujte vdumat'sja v éti obrazy, dat' sebe otčet v každoj ix čerte, masterski otmečennoj avtorom, i vy uvidite, čto esli-by vy vzdumali zapisat' vaši mysli, vam ponadobilos' by v neskol'ko raz bol'še mesta, čem avtoru dlja vsego rasskaza: otdel'noe slovo ego razroslos' -- by v dve-tri frazy -- *nastol'ko velika "gustota mysli" i sila xudožestvennyx štrixov v étom proizvedenii, kotoroe v texnike vypolnenija smelo možno postavit' na rjadu s lučšimi proizvedenijami russkoj literatury.* (S.M.)[71]

The critic also praised the original manner in which Gor'kij treated "snoxačestvo" -- a subject that had plagued Russian society for centuries. He observed that Gor'kij avoided taking sides, instead allowing events to take shape. This, he claimed, resulted in a balanced picture and made it difficult to assign blame. He commended Gor'kij both for the masterly way in which he handled this very important subject in Russian life and for remaining truthful to reality in his presentation.

Aleksandrovskij compared "Skuki radi" to "Na plotax" and observed that, like in the latter, Gor'kij's mastery is complete, as he is able to depict in only a few pages a number of faces and a whole scene of life at a remote railway station. He noted that whether it is in the description of forgotten women in "Skuki radi", or so-called "fallen people" in his tramp stories, Gor'kij was able to show qualities in his characters that further awakened the sympathy of his readers. The critic argued that the emotional sensitivity generated by this approach forced readers to identify with Gor'kij's characters

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[71] Aleksandrovskij, 1901: 49-50.

and allowed them to approach them as fellow human beings. He remarked that this was the case in "Boles" in which a lonely woman, with the help of a student, writes to and receives letters from an imaginary boyfriend. Aleksandrovskij pointed out that by using this approach, Gor'kij was able to exploit the empathy of his readers with these victims, and that he also succeeded in bringing home the message that despite their immense suffering his characters were no different from other people.

Additionally, Aleksandrovskij commented on Gor'kij's depiction of the intelligentsia and praised his ability to bring to life, in a very few sentences, clear images of some rotten and infamous Russian intellectuals. For example, he commended his success in portraying the living conditions of the railway chief and his family in "Skuki radi". He noted the ease with which Gor'kij's picture creates feelings of disgust and indignation toward these wicked and morally depraved people, who pretend to be intellectuals. Aleksandrovskij recalled similar successes in Gor'kij's use of the personalities of Professor Polkanov and Varen'ka in "Varen'ka Olesova" to show the moral depravity of the teacher, who takes advantage of his pupil.

Contending that a knowledge of Gor'kij's world view is important in order to understand his creative instincts and literary outlook, Aleksandrovskij turned primarily to "O čerte" and "Čitatel'" to discuss such matters as the writer's aims and objectives in writing, his attitude to society and the role of literature in society. He observed, for example, that in the first story, Gor'kij presented the reader with the disappointing life of a writer, who, after spending a good part of his life publishing in major journals is forgotten after his death; nevertheless, the sad ending of the story did not deter Gor'kij

from expressing his personal beliefs about the social role and responsibilities of writers. Citing extensively from "Čitatel'" to highlight Gor'kij's aims and objectives, Aleksandrovskij observed that Gor'kij saw the need for literature to help people understand themselves, raise their self-confidence and trust, as well as develop in them a thirst for the truth. Similarly, he noted that Gor'kij trusted literature to identify the good in people, awaken in them the elements of shame, anger and courage, help them fight stupidity and vanity, while aiding them to revive their lives through beauty. In fact, the critic contended that Gor'kij's position on these matters increased the respect of his readers for him.

Aleksandrovskij also expressed concern about the important issue of positive characters in Gor'kij's work and warned that the writer ran the danger of slipping away from what he did best. He recalled that similar concerns had led Gogol' to destroy the second volume of his *Dead Souls*, and he found that signs of similar difficulty may have already surfaced in Gor'kij's new book *Mužik*, in which he attempted, for the first time, and rather unsuccessfully, to create positive heroes.

In his summary of his impressions of Gor'kij's creative work, Aleksandrovskij acknowledged that given what was already known about him, it was fair to speak of a strong artistic talent despite some weak works or less artistic passages in some of his stories. He recalled that several great names in world literature had similar problems, especially at the early stages of their careers, and he pointed out that in spite of some shortcomings, there were in his oeuvre full length works, worthy of a first class writer. Moreover, he acknowledged Gor'kij's many-sidedness and described as a major literary

achievement Gor'kij's ability to depict with clarity events from different types of life.

Like other critics, Aleksandrovskij noted that Gor'kij's main advantage over his peers was the relative absence of literary influences upon him. This, he argued, allowed him a good measure of originality, especially at the beginning of his career. Aleksandrovskij rejected exaggerated allegations of Nietzschean influence on Gor'kij inasmuch as it was difficult to identify any concrete connection between the two writers. In this regard, he pointed out that even Mixajlovskij, who had first made the observation about similarities between Gor'kij and Nietzsche spoke not of literary influence, but of the effects of the epoch. Aleksandrovskij blamed Gor'kij's critics for blowing Mixajlovskij's remarks out of proportion and rightly insisted that similarity of ideas among writers cannot necessarily be interpreted as influence of one on the other.

Even more importantly, Aleksandrovskij's denials of Nietzschean influence on Gor'kij are significant for the latter's later image, in Soviet Russian literature in particular, as deliberate attempts were made both by the author and his supporters to rid him of what was deemed undesirable company. All in all, Aleksandrovskij confirmed the era's predominantly positive assessment of Gor'kij's work and contributed to the intensification of the "Gor'kij" legend by exonerating him from his weaknesses and stressing his strengths. On the one hand, he did this by echoing the recurrent positive elements in Gor'kij criticism up until then. Significantly, he emphasized Gor'kij's objectivity. Like others before him, Aleksandrovskij equated Gor'kij's frank and unembellished approach to the subjects he discussed in his work with a high level of authorial objectivity. On the other hand, Aleksandrovskij attributed Gor'kij's weaknesses

to similar occurrences in the work of other leading writers of the previous century.

Owing to the ambiguity in the assessment of Gor'kij's work long after he had become a main focus in turn-of-the century Russian literature, the debate over his image raged on into the first decade. This period also witnessed Gor'kij's exploration of new thematic areas and genres and his movement away from *bosjak* characters. Probably because of this diversification, the number of participants in the debate grew, and attempts were made to adopt new approaches to his work. It was as a result of this that critics such as Leonid Egorovič Obolenskij (1845-1906), in his role as editor of *Russkoe bogatstvo* from 1883 to 1891, advocated less traditional approaches to Gor'kij.

In an article called "Talant Maksima Gor'kogo"[72], Obolenskij commented on the surge in Gor'kij's popularity and the staggering attempts by various critics to characterize him and he also noted the difficulty in assessing a talented writer like Gor'kij at the start of his career. He asserted that there had been a massive failure by critics to characterize the young writer properly. This, he attributed to attempts to measure Gor'kij's work against previous standards. He pointed out that this approach was particularly faulty in the case of talented writers, whose originality lies in their differences from others.

To address this problem, Obolenskij called for new approaches that would allow critics to examine closely the work of individual writers with a view to identifying and understanding their distinctly peculiar characteristics and qualities. Obolenskij did praise Mixajlovskij for effectively characterizing Gor'kij's early career and added that, if the

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[72] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 247.

latter had been unable to say much about Gor'kij, it was primarily because the writer was only just starting out. Obolenskij attributed Gor'kij's immense popularity with the Russian reading public to the literary and artistic qualities of his work, as well as to reasons specific to him. For example, he stressed that Gor'kij differed from his peers because his work was a result of a deep, internal feeling guided by an undaunting search for the truth. He claimed that this made it impossible for him to be overly concerned with detail about form. Obolenskij suggested that the beauty of Gor'kij's work lay in the fact that: "Ego kraski, épitety, slova vyryvajutsja samy soboju, bez ego vedoma, iz serdca, izmučennogo "sutulokoj i burelomom", bezobrazijami i "tesnotoj žizni", -- kak vyryvajutsja vopli iz grudi ranennego."[73]

Like Mixajlovskij, Obolenskij pointed to the spectacular nature descriptions in Gor'kij's work and considered them the mark of an able and gifted author. He noted that while this aspect of his work is only a general requirement for good writing, there is a specific Gor'kian quality in it. He argued that, unlike the esthetic and elegiac feelings in Turgenev's nature descriptions or the pantheistic overwhelming emotions evoked by Puškin and Gogol', Gor'kij revealed an agonizing and fomenting love of nature, which reflects his inner world. He observed that nature does not just evoke a quiet melancholic feeling for Gor'kij. Rather, Gor'kij conveys through it something close to human love. He claimed that Gor'kij seldom attained pleasure from nature and that even when he did, the numbing effects of his descriptions are soon replaced by questions, doubts, anguish and guesses.

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[73] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 237.

Obolenskij commented on the much-debated issue of the relationship between Gor'kij and his tramp characters. He argued that Gor'kij's attitude depended mostly on contemporary conditions of life and had little to do with his own nature. He considered Gor'kij's sensitivity to his characters a result both of his life experiences and of his desire to impart to others the existence of an underground world populated by people, who were as decent as or even in some cases better than many others. The critic explained that Gor'kij's eagerness to introduce outsiders to the world of the underground may have resulted inadvertently in the idealization of its characters. He likened Gor'kij's approach to that of post- prison camp Dostoevskij in *Mertvyj dom*. He further observed that the tendency to idealize is a general psychological attitude among writers who come into close contact with the underworld and was, therefore, not specific to Gor'kij.

Obolenskij did assert that if there was anything specific to Gor'kij's approach to the tramp character, it was the passion with which he idealized him -- indeed, so much so that he became almost unnatural. He noted, for example, that he made ordinary tramps assume the role of philosophers and that, while making drunkenness the only option for them, he idealized. While Obolenskij argued that the writer's particular approach was important for understanding his work, he admitted it was hard to say conclusively where it would lead in the future.

Obolenskij rated Gor'kij above Gleb Uspenskij, arguing that the ideals expressed in Gor'kij's work were relatively easier to understand and closer to the reader. He stressed that, unlike his predecessors, Gor'kij highlighted ideals that emphasized faith in oneself and one's abilities -- ideals the critic found practically and spiritually useful to Russian

society. As a result, he noted:

> ... éto bol'še vsego privleklo k nemu serdca tolpy, konečno, esli brat' v rasčet tol'ko idejnuju storonu, pomimo ego ogromnogo xudožestvennogo talanta, ego psixologičeskoj, neobyknovennoj prozorlivosti, ego čudnogo dara jarkoj obraznosti v opisanii ljudej i prirody, nakonec, ego porazitel'noj nabljudatel'nosti."
> "Odno k odnomu: vse éti kačestva, soedinivšis' vmeste s blagodarnoj, podxodjaščej k nastojatel'nejšej potrebnosti, ideej, sdelali M. Gor'kogo odnim iz krupnejšix javlenij našej sovremennoj literatury.[74]

Finally, on Gor'kij's future, Obolenskij noted that while it was certain that he would make mistakes on his literary journey, there was no doubt that he would be heard from in the years to come.

It is significant that Obolenskij drew attention to the importance of the moment in accounting for the popularity of Gor'kij's work. In particular, he stressed Gor'kij's ability to respond adequately to the needs of the era. Thus, it can be rightly argued that while Obolenskij attributed Gor'kij's success primarily to talent, he was also aware of the role extra-literary factors played in Gor'kij's reception.

While the views expressed above are representative of the general impression Gor'kij left on his contemporaries, they are by no means the only ones. While there is disagreement about the nature of Gor'kij's work and its impact on Russian life, the intensity of the debate makes it clear that it was both absorbing and worthwhile for his contemporaries. The list of people who reacted to his work and its impact on Russian society range from literary critics and writers such as Mixajlovskij, Bogdanovič,

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[74] L.E. Obolenskij, *Maksim Gor'kij i pričiny ego uspexa. Opyt paralleli s A. Čexovym i Gl. Uspenskim*, (St. Petersburg: 1903) 142.

Skabičevskij and Čexov to sociologists and religious personalities and even to what would be considered today as feminists. For example, Gor'kij was not only castigated by religious leaders such as T.S. Petrov, who accused him of undermining the religious tenets of Russian society,[75] he also had the grudging recognition of Nadežda Luxmanova, a leading woman writer, who, while praising him for giving an identity to his female characters, blamed him for promoting moral degradation, in particular among his young readers.[76]

It is worthwhile to end this chapter with a quotation from one more critic who wrote extensively on Gor'kij's early career. While Volžskij (Aleksandr Sergeevič Glinka, 1878-date n.a.) acknowledged in "O nekotoryx motivax tvorčestva Maksima Gor'kogo" that the theoretical basis of Gor'kij's artistic philosophy is laden with negative elements, he conceded that this did not diminish the practical import of his poetry of will, and its call to struggle.[77] More importantly, the critic pointed out that Gor'kij's artistic philosophy is rich in internal conflict and thus affords possibilities of different interpretations.

The latter observation could not be more appropriate inasmuch as it is evidenced by the myriads of material on Gor'kij's early life and work. While one can argue that the

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[75] T.S. Petrov, *Brat'ja pisateli*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: Vošinskij, 1904) 151 pages.

[76] N.A. Luxmanova, *Nedočety sovremennoj ženšiny*, (Moscow: 1904) 133.

[77] *Kritičeskoe posobie. Sbornik vydajuščixsja statej russkoj kritiki za 100 let*, (N.p: n.d) 234. This article was also published in *Iz mira literaturnyx iskanij. Sbornik statej.* (St. Petersburg: D.E. Žukovskij, 1906) 130-162.

topical nature of some of the issues raised in Gor'kij's short stories make them now irrelevant to us, thereby constantly diminishing the interest of today's readers, contemporary reaction from both his admirers and detractors testify to their importance at the time they were written. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that the diversity in the background of people who reacted to his work and the passion with which the debate was conducted are further indicative of Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature and cultural life.

I would argue that while these observations and impressions left by Gor'kij's contemporaries may not have been subsequently conclusive in determining his image and place in Russian literary life, there is sufficient evidence to show that they played a significant role in determining the way he was received both then, and more especially, in the years following the Bol'ševik revolution when there was a need to enlist literature in the fight for a brighter future. For example, rampant and persistent comparisons between Gor'kij and the great Russian writers of the preceding period both in stature and subject matter make it easy for supporters of the writer to see him as a continuer of nineteenth century realism as well as of the Russian literary tradition which defends ordinary people. Besides, Gor'kij's personal involvement in the major social and political events of the time made his name easily recognizable all through Russia, and increasingly made it more difficult to determine the real source of his popularity.

Perhaps, in summarizing the reasons that accounted for Gor'kij's rapid success, particular mention should be made of the persistent references to the author's objectivity in the way he discussed the various subjects he dealt with and the manner in which he

presented that material. This may have resulted from Gor'kij's alleged direct knowledge of the people and environment he wrote about. As I have mentioned earlier, there was a strong tendency among contemporary critics to confound Gor'kij's frank and sincere approach, which often approached contemporary reality, with a strong sense of objectivity. Often, critics found justification for this in the fact that Gor'kij either witnessed or partook of the events he described, and therefore could be trusted both as a reliable narrator and objective writer.

Still, it is obvious from the general impressions left by the contemporaries of the writer that while other factors such as timing, subject matter and the emergence of new literary trends at the time Gor'kij appeared on the Russian literary scene may have contributed to popularizing him, there is little doubt that the writer's talent and person put him well above his peers and earned him well-deserved praise among contemporary readers and critics alike. As Tolstoj explained later, Gor'kij owed his popularity to the fact that "he touched upon important issues and answered them as the large masses of people would."[78] And this may well have been the secret to the writer's overwhelming acclaim especially at home, but also abroad.

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[78] Xoroš, "Tolstoj o Gor'kom.", Na literaturnom postu. May 1928: 27.

Chapter Six

The Novel in Early Gor'kij Criticism. [*Foma Gordeev* (1899), *Mužik* (1900), *Troe* (1901)].

While the immense popularity of Gor'kij's *bosjak* stories made him synonymous with the short story, he made, by the end of the nineteenth century, numerous, albeit, unsuccessful attempts at widening his thematic and genre scope. Encouraged by Čexov and nurtured by a budding friendship with Stanislavskij, who sought to rejuvenate the sinking fortunes of MXAT, Gor'kij decided to try his hand at drama. But before he did so on a grand scale with *Meščane* and *Na dne* in 1901 and 1902 respectively, he turned his attention to the novel which was still a genre of major importance in Russia at the time.

While it is hard to say precisely why Gor'kij made the novel his priority at this particular time in his career, it is likely that he did so not only for purely artistic reasons, but possibly because he coveted the glory that success in this form would bring. It can be argued, thus, that Gor'kij not only regarded a successful novel as a way of fulfilling his artistic ambitions, but also as a means of guaranteeing himself a permanent place in the history of Russian literature alongside such names as Dostoevskij and Tolstoj, who had made their renown, primarily as novelists.

Moreover, it is likely that an overwhelmingly successful early career rooted primarily on the short story and coupled with the support of the leading contemporary

critics gave Gor'kij a tremendous amount of confidence and prompted him on to pursue a new stage of contributing importantly to Russian cultural identity. Similarly, it is possible that his near-decade long concentration on the short story form was another reason why some people in the literary community encouraged him to go beyond the short story and his *bosjaki*. Moreover, Gor'kij may have thought of the novel not only as a personal challenge, but more importantly as a way to prove to those critics who continued to associate his success entirely with the short story that he was an accomplished writer with a broad range.

Additionally, it can be argued that the end of the century's expansion in the political, social and cultural needs of the country made it imperative for Gor'kij to widen the scope of his work if he intended to capture the new moment in his oeuvre. Events of epic proportions like the introduction of capitalism into Russia, the need for industrial labourers and the attendant migration of people from rural areas into large cities could only be captured fully by the novel. In addition, the proliferation of different and often conflicting political philosophies at the turn of the century strengthened the pressures to democratize the country. Given the scope of changing events and conditions in Russia at the time, one is led to think that Gor'kij's shift toward the novel came in response to his efforts to present his readers with the historical and social epic of the time.

While the real reasons for Gor'kij's move in this direction may never be adequately explained, the numerous attempts he made at writing a novel before, during and after his dramatic work suggest that the task was dear to him. The weak novels of Gor'kij's pre-dramatic period, the highly publicised and controversial *Mat'* (1906), the

acclaimed *Ispoved' (1908)* and the incomplete *Žizn' Klima Samgina* (1925-1936) offer examples of Gor'kij's intense and persistent desire to achieve that objective.

While the themes and personalities Gor'kij dealt with during and after the bosjak period remained remarkably intertwined, the novel brought significant changes in the writer's overall approach. For example, he shifted emphasis from his romantic and legendary hero-personalities like Larra and Izergil' (both in "Staruxa Izergil'"), who lived and cherished a haphazard and unplanned lifestyle, and began to introduce into his work somewhat determined and calculating characters from specific sectors of society -- e.g. Šebuev in *Mužik*. These characters became more focused in purpose and, unlike their predecessors in the short story whose protests were largely lame and had no specific target or objective, the characters in his novels (and dramatic works) began to act on behalf of the collective. Thus, a character like Pavel Vlasov in *Mat'* is shown as extremely altruistic and disengages from individual pursuits and involvement in social issues.

Perhaps the one most important and notable change in the post-short story period was the dramatic shift from individual characters at the head of the crowd to a more inclusive personality, who, while leading his neighbours, was no longer the sole focus as had been the case in earlier works such as "Staruxa Izergil'". As a result, in works like *Foma Gordeev* and *Mat'*, it became possible for strong alternates like Jakov Majakin, Andrej Naxotka or the mother to compete with the main heroes for leading roles.

Similarly, Gor'kij moved his emphasis from rural characters to urban and more sophisticated personalities. As a result, their concerns and interests shifted from a narrow focus on Russian country traditions and mores and the relationship between the peasant and the educated class, to new domains involving the worker, the merchant-entrepreneur and the bourgeois. Gor'kij began to raise issues about work, wealth, conscience and commitment, all of which became increasingly important for Russian society at the dawn of the twentieth century. The need to deal with these issues became especially pressing with the introduction of capitalism throughout the Russian Empire and the development of new relationships among the various sectors of society. These and other related matters became Gor'kij's main preoccupation in *Foma Gordeev*, *Mužik* and *Troe*.

No other novel among Gor'kij's works dealt with the issues enumerated above better than *Foma Gordeev*. Written in two parts and published in 1899, *Foma Gordeev* marked the first real thematic and genre shift in Gor'kij's work. In it, the "Burevestnik" of Russian cultural and political life shifted his attention away from the familiar *bosjak* personality so linked to his name to focus, in a novel, on the merchant communities of the Volga. No wonder, therefore, that *Foma Gordeev* raised high hopes both among readers and literary critics alike when it first appeared.

Like Gor'kij's earlier works, *Foma Gordeev* had its admirers and detractors. But unlike the *bosjak* stories which received generally favourable reviews, *Foma Gordeev* was dogged by controversy almost from the onset. While the first part of the novel was met enthusiastically by most contemporary critics, the second part brought accusations of inconsistency -- especially because of the manner in which its main protagonist ended his

life. Reviews of both *Mužik* and *Troe* did not differ significantly from the latter reaction. Not only were reviews largely negative, the two novels themselves also received far less attention than *Foma Gordeev* and the preceding short stories.

It is not immediately clear why Gor'kij failed to sustain the same level of interest in his novels and novellas as he had with his short stories. However, it is likely, that apart from the feeling among certain critics that Gor'kij was synonymous with the *bosjak* story, his initial failure to win over his readers with *Foma Gordeev* may well have accounted for the generally low critical attention his subsequent novels received -- primarily from the same critics who had written extensively on Gor'kij's short stories. Moreover, if the generally monolithic positive assessment found in earlier reviews of the writer's work are any indication of the attitude of contemporary critics toward him, then the overwhelmingly negative reception of his longer works should not come as a surprise since many of the views expressed by the majority of critics appeared to duplicate the predominantly negative opinion about *Foma Gordeev* prevalent at the time.

It is clear from the very slight attention given by critics to *Foma Gordeev* at its publication that this novel was no match for the *bosjak* stories. Very often, views on this and other novels were tagged onto long commentaries about his short stories -- almost like afterthoughts. This practice is especially widespread among the critics discussed here and it helps to explain why views on Gor'kij's novels are generally short. It should also be noted that the partisan approach that later developed among contemporary critics with respect to the totality of Gor'kij's work and his contribution to Russian literature in particular, began to manifest itself by this time. Thus, while supporters of the writer saw

Foma Gordeev, for example, as continuing the same ideals Gor'kij had upheld earlier in his *bosjak* stories and considered this novel just as successful, his critics dismissed it outright as a failure.

The foregoing tendencies can be observed in both the approach and comments of a number of commentators. Reviewing the first four volumes of Gor'kij's short stories in "Krasivyj cinizm",[79] M. Men'šikov, a conservative critic and admirer of Gor'kij's bosjak stories, argued that *Foma Gordeev* represented a continuation of Gor'kij's castigation of the human conscience as well as his continued support of the idea of the Superman. In particular, he criticized Gor'kij's depiction of Foma as a failure which resulted, primarily, from this character's good conscience. Furthermore, the critic pointed to Gor'kij's glorification of Jakov Majakin as the bearer of wise and sober speeches, despite his passionate attacks on morals. Men'šikov argued that this further demonstrated Gor'kij's assault on conscience.

Notwithstanding Men'šikov's dislike for this particular novel, the critic, nevertheless, compared Gor'kij's deep knowledge of the characters and their environment favourably with those of Turgenev and Tolstoj. As was already stated earlier, Men'šikov considered Gor'kij's oeuvre a revelation of the author's inner self and noted with satisfaction that Gor'kij was able to put himself on the same level with high-society

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[79] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 181-209. This article was first published under the title "Kritičeskie zametki. Krasivyj cinizm. (M. Gor'kij. Rasskazy. Toma I-IV. Pb. 1900.)" in the September edition of *Knižnaja Nedelja*; 212-221; The same article also appears in M. Men'šikov, *Kritičeskie očerki*. Vol. II. (St. Petersburg: Trud; 1902).

writers despite his lack of formal education.

L. Obolenskij took a slightly different stance in remarking in his introductory notes leading to a review of *Foma Gordeev*[80] that if Tolstoj, Dostoevskij and Turgenev were famous because of their contributions to Russian literature in particular and world literature in general, the same could not be said about Čexov and Gor'kij. He pointed out that, unlike their predecessors who made their name with the novel, Čexov and Gor'kij built their respective reputations on short stories. He added that by the time they wrote their most important novels -- *Step'* and *V ovrage*, on the one hand, and *Foma Gordeev*, on the other, the two were already popular. While Obolenskij does not categorically deny the importance of their novels to the popularity of the two younger writers, he does not attribute a great role to them in their popularity. Besides, statements about Gor'kij's pre-novel popularity and its influence on the relatively less successful period when he wrote novels make it difficult, if not impossible, to say with any precision whether critical reactions to *Foma Gordeev* and other novels by the same writer were based on what was already known about Gor'kij from his earlier works or whether these represented a genuine reflection of what readers and critics thought of the specific novel.

For his part, however, Obolenskij observed, like the majority of his contemporaries, that Foma Gordeev, the novel's main hero is driven by the same passionate search for the meaning of life that was so prominent in Gor'kij's short stories.

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[80] L.E. Obolenskij, *Maksim Gor'kij i pričiny ego uspexa. Opyt paralleli s A. Čexovym i Gl. Uspenskim.* (St. Petersburg: 1903).

Similarly, in another article entitled "Maksim Gor'kij i idei ego novyx geroev",[81] Obolenskij reiterated the view held by many that Gor'kij not only intensified his attempts at finding an explanation for the meaning of life in *Foma Gordeev* and *Mužik*, he also observed that the writer went to greater lengths to widen the social background of his heroes. For example, he pointed out that while Gor'kij had failed to link convincingly the individual characteristics of his heroes in the first novel with the proletariat, he attempted for the first time to offer a class-based explanation for the attitudes of a whole group of people. He also found it important that this search involved the *intelligentsia*, who were expected to provide answers about the direction of life in the future.

Following these developments, Obolenskij revised his earlier observations about the direction Gor'kij's search for truth had assumed. He acknowledged that Gor'kij's search did not simply seek to explain why certain people belonged to certain classes, but centred more specifically on explaining the direction, insufficiencies and dissatisfaction of members of the Russian intelligentsia. Obolenskij indicated that in *Mužik*, for example, Gor'kij attempted to account for the development of a new type of intelligentsia from hitherto unrecognized social groups. Furthermore, Obolenskij defended Mixajlovskij's earlier claim that there were no grounds for anyone to call Gor'kij a Decadent, noting that with the publication of *Foma Gordeev* and *Mužik*, Gor'kij began to pay considerable attention to matters of economic interests as well as the class struggle. He noted, for example, that it was at this time in his career that Gor'kij raised

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[81] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 236-246. This article was first published in *Severnyj kur'er*, No. 196, 20 March and No. 198, 22 March of the same year.

the possibility of his tramps belonging to the proletariat. However, he observed that the stereotypical common traits shared by Gor'kij's fictional characters and the real life proletariat -- failure in life, drunkenness and depravity -- were not typical of the proletariat. More specifically, Obolenskij explained that rather than state simply that Gor'kij began to consider various characters belonging to different classes at this time in his career, it would be more appropriate to speak about "ob'jasnenie napravlenij, nedostatkov, neudovletvoritel'nosti suščestvujuščix tipov russkoj intelligencii klassovymi pričinami."[82] For Obolenskij, the main reason Gor'kij adopted this approach was his desire to identify the emergence of a new type of intelligentsia, able to provide answers to Foma's quest.

While Obolenskij acknowledged that the idea of the intelligentsia originating from other classes existed earlier in Russian literature in the works of Pomjalovskij, Uspenskij and Mixajlovskij, he remarked, nevertheless, that there was a fundamental difference in Gor'kij's treatment of the subject. For example, he pointed to the passion, force and depth of the human elements that Gor'kij brought to his work and the subject in particular and described Gor'kij's distinctive approach as follows:

> Ego priem...sostoit v tom, čto on, na rjadu s individual'nymi čertami geroja, sxvatyvaet i semejnye, nasledstvennye, složivšiesja pod vlijaniem professii (klassa) i usilivaet éti poslednie do takoj jarkosti, čto pered nami vstaet uže neobydennaja figura, kotoruju v žizni my by i ne zametili, a polureal'noe, poluideal'noe, počti simvoličeskoe izvejanie, monument celogo soslovija v ego tipičnyx čertax.[83]

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[82] Obolenskij, 1903: 92.

[83] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 239.

It must be noted that just as similar comparisons in Gor'kij's short story period put him on the same pedestal with Turgenev, Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov and led to wide acclaim for his work especially abroad, such flattering praise for Gor'kij's literary skills particularly in comparison with some of the best writers of the day not only put him above his contemporaries, but also served later as fertile grounds for his being canonized in the Soviet era.

Commenting on *Troe* (1901), a novel for which he hailed Gor'kij's return to art after an intense search for the meaning of life, especially in *Foma Gordeev* and *Mužik*, Obolenskij refused to condemn Gor'kij's shift away from art in favour of other matters. Instead, he argued that Gor'kij was not alone in this regard, inasmuch as many great writers had often turned their attention to social, political and moral issues in their careers. Obolenskij maintained that as citizens, writers had a right to engage in such discussions and referred to such moments in Gor'kij's work as outbursts of lyrical oratory. Again, while the effects of such statements on the Gor'kij canon cannot be fully measured, it would seem that such excuses in his favour made it possible for his supporters to obscure some of his weaknesses by pointing to similar problems in the works of some of Russia's most renowned writers.

Obolenskij defended Gor'kij against the oft-made criticism that contrary to reality, his characters philosophize more than professional philosophers. For example, he claimed that to dismiss Gor'kij's child philosophers in *Troe* is to acknowledge a lack of knowledge of children and their environment. Calling the novel refreshing and objective, and, consequently, a reflection of reality, the critic maintained that Gor'kij neither

exaggerated nor fantasized such scenes. Instead, he pointed out that the picture Gor'kij painted resulted from his personal experiences with the people about whom he wrote. Obolenskij contended that, like every one else, children have concerns about life and will continuously ask questions in an attempt to understand why other people differ from them. With respect to the literary merits of the work, Obolenskij remarked that *Troe* contains many examples of artistic beauty. For example, he cited the unusually striking characters Gor'kij introduced into the work, including what he called an array of almost real life heroes standing before the reader and giving the latter the impression that he has met these figures in real life. Obolenskij emphasized that this is so notwithstanding the fact that these characters are sketched in only a few pages. In fact, the critic's admiration for Gor'kij's character depiction is so intense that he admonished the reader to read the novel in order to experience directly the writer's ability to sketch out characters in as few words as possible.

Moreover, Obolenskij pointed out that the clarity and beauty of Gor'kij's characters is not only external, but internal. It is especially the latter ("vnutrennjaja jarkost'") which constitutes the other peculiarity of *Troe* for Obolenskij. He considered Gor'kij an astounding psychological writer, whose work revealed the inner side of his characters through a feeling and understanding of their motives, peculiarities, pain and spiritual joys. Most importantly for Obolenskij, Gor'kij did all this "...bez vsjakogo misticizma, prosto, bez malejšix natjažek, uxiščrenij, éffektov, počti nepredumyšlenno..."[84] As a result of this, Obolenskij remarked a near absence of

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[84] Obolenskij, 1903: 109.

matters that did not deal directly with the inner life of characters in *Troe*. He also noted Gor'kij's almost deliberate avoidance of such matters and praised him for the approach.

Obolenskij observed that few writers could have resisted using the murder of the smith's wife in *Troe* to introduce other issues that were not of a psychological nature into their work. To back this argument, Obolenskij recalled that Raskol'nikov's murder of the old broker and Smerdjakov's preparation to kill his father provide Dostoevskij material for whole chapters in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* and *Brat'ja Karamazovy* respectively. Similarly, Obolenskij cited the depiction of the murder of Ivan the Terrible in Repin's work and the excessive attention given to the murder.

Observing that it was unartistic to present murder on stage, Obolenskij praised Gor'kij for holding the attention of his reader with the murder episode without making the event itself occur before him. Even more importantly, the critic observed that Gor'kij presented all this in a few pages through authorial sketches and words extracted from individuals. Finally, Obolenskij expressed his fascination at Gor'kij's ability to shake the human soul with deep emotions without the tricks common to other writers before him.

Citing another example of masterly art in *Troe*, Obolenskij pointed to the scene in which the old rag collector had his possessions stolen by a bartender and his aide. He noted that Gor'kij's artistic feeling is so sharp that he avoided using this event to highlight the struggle between the old man and his attackers. Instead, he pointed out that Gor'kij presented the same events in a pre-death hallucination in which the old man anticipates his attackers. Citing similar examples in the novel, Obolenskij concluded that the reader is left with the impression that Gor'kij is a master of art rather than an

apprentice, who tries to shock his reader. The result, in Obolenskij's view is a real artistic pearl in which the physiological effects of the events are subordinated to their psychological and moral horrors. On the whole, Obolenskij registered his general impressions of the novel as follows:

> Obščaja ideja, vozbuždennaja lično vo mne vsej povest'ju, sostoit v tom, čto sredi vsex uslovij žizni, v kakie sud'ba brosila Il'ju (glavnogo geroja), samaja mogučaja sila, samaja nepreklonnaja énergija dolžny razbit'sja o stenu, esli čelovek, krome čisto žitejskix celej -- naživy, pokojnoj "blagoobraznoj" žizni, ešče nosit' v svoej duše žaždu, xotja by i smutnuju, ne tol'ko vnešnego, no i vnutrennego, duševnogo "blagoobrazija."[85]

On the allegedly weak ending of the novel and the failure of its main hero, Obolenskij argued that Il'ja was the victim of his own attempts to harmonize the incompatible. He pointed out that, despite Il'ja's tragic end, Gor'kij was able to bring to light the psychology of a large sector of contemporary Russian society through his internal drama. Finally, Obolenskij commended Gor'kij for the novel's wealth of material and originality, which he claimed was absent in Russian literature at the time.

Unlike many other critics, Obolenskij's assessment of Gor'kij's novels was closely tied to their text. He dwelled significantly on the artistic qualities of *Troe* and *Foma Gordeev* in particular, and demonstrated the shift in subject matter and characterization that appeared in Gor'kij's work immediately following his short story period. Further to this, Obolenskij emphasized the skill with which Gor'kij handled his material and praised the author for his deep concern for psychological matters in his work.

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[85] Obolenskij, 1903: 140.

While he may have rated Gor'kij much lower on the literary scale than Dostoevskij and Tolstoj, one can conclude safely that he saw some merit in the novels of the younger writer. In fact, Obolenskij's favourable references to Gor'kij's work in comparison with such names as Gončarov and G. Uspenskij placed the writer in the company of some of the best representatives of Russian literature in the nineteenth century, while his emphasis on Gor'kij's psychological insights, especially in association with Dostoevskij, placed him far ahead of his peers. Besides, the critic's comments on Gor'kij's masterly abilities in the genre of the novel, and especially in the area of psychologism appear to reflect a shift in Gor'kij's approach from "shocking effects" of his short story period to a more mature exploration of the internal world of his heroes.

A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the views of T. Aleksandrovskij, who in a work devoted mainly to the four volumes of Gor'kij's *Očerki i rasskazy*,[86] affirmed the prevailing view that *Foma Gordeev* not only represented Gor'kij's break with the tramp character, but also raised considerable interest both in itself and in its creator. Aleksandrovskij noted that with *Foma Gordeev*, Gor'kij's focus shifted for the first time to merchant surroundings, which, after Ostrovskij, had received little attention. However, it is clear from the onset that Aleksandrovskij did not like the novel, for it lacked the artistic beauty he had praised earlier in Gor'kij's short stories. He pointed out that with few exceptions, *Foma Gordeev* is blurred and lacks creativity. Aleksandrovskij particularly condemned the "long, unartistic and boring" judgements Gor'kij passes on various protagonists in the novel.

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[86] T. Aleksandrovskij, *Maksim Gor'kij i ego sočinenija. Publičnye lekcii. Kritičeskij očerk.* (Kiev: 1901) 80 pages.

In explaining why he thought Gor'kij failed in the novel despite his tremendous success with the short story, Aleksandrovskij expressed the opinion that the writer's talent may have been suited to short stories than longer forms. He speculated that the main idea in *Foma Gordeev* had not taken shape firmly before Gor'kij wrote the novel whose writing must have been hurried to satisfy the demands of Gor'kij's publishers.

Still further, the critic maintained that Gor'kij had not thoroughly thought through all the component parts of the work and must thereby have damaged the idea of the novel. Aleksandrovskij blamed Gor'kij for overburdening the reader with too many episodes aimed at explaining Foma's spiritual growth, which in his view, turned out to obscure Gor'kij's objective. He observed that the novel's tendency to over-elaborate failed to add anything significantly new to Foma's image. On the contrary, he argued that this resulted in erasing even the few memorable moments in the work.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Aleksandrovskij found Foma's life to be of interest to the reader since the novel evolves around him. However, commenting on Foma's place in the novel, the critic criticized Gor'kij for devoting about fifty pages to describing his childhood and adolescence alone, for these had no meaningful effects on the direction of his adult life. Moreover, he accused Gor'kij of throwing together scattered episodes from Foma's life with no unified idea behind their ordering.

With respect to secondary characters in *Foma Gordeev*, Aleksandrovskij noted that these had provided Gor'kij with an opportunity to portray the merchant environment better than any other writer before him. He observed that Gor'kij did not just present a single and unified merchant group, but one composed of different layers. In this regard,

the critic ranked Gor'kij second only to Ostrovskij in his treatment of the Russian merchant. For example, he pointed to the close similarities between the domestic life of Jakov Majakin (whom he described as the most rounded and artistically complete character in the novel) and the traditional principles of the Russian merchant community in Ostrovskij's work. Crediting Gor'kij with introducing new literary elements in this domain, Aleksandrovskij argued that, as a result of contemporary influences, Gor'kij's portrayal of Majakin enriched the merchant figure with elements absent in Ostrovskij's depiction of the merchant personality. As a result of these additions and modifications, he observed that, notwithstanding inconsistencies surrounding the origins of some of his characters, Gor'kij revealed a new breed of merchants in his work.

Yet, while Aleksandrovskij saw the importance of Foma in his daring protest against injustice, he asserted that he was only a variant of Gor'kij's tramp figures. He argued that despite all the differences that set him apart from other members of his community and earned him the title of the "ailing conscience" of the merchant class, Foma displayed all the major features associated with the best of Gor'kij's tramp figures. Aleksandrovskij observed that, like them, Foma has nothing in common with his surroundings and is also unable to find a place in life for himself. In addition, he maintained that Foma's close similarity with Gor'kij's earlier heroes can be seen in his aspirations for the unknown as well as in his desire to cling to a wide range of liberties. Also, Aleksandrovskij commented on Gor'kij's attempts to create positive characters. He expressed concern that Gor'kij risked sliding away from what he knew and did best in this pursuit.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, Aleksandrovskij reiterated the view shared by many that the initial difficulties Gor'kij experienced in his early attempts at the novel were common among some of the great names in world literature. Thus, while he admitted that Gor'kij's initial efforts were not entirely successful, he believed they were consistent with those of his more renowned predecessors. Even more significantly for the future of his career and probably for the way other critics would judge Gor'kij, Aleksandrovskij observed that the writer's mistakes were not insurmountable. Thus, it would seem that, like the majority of his contemporaries, Aleksandrovskij was willing to give Gor'kij time to improve his skills at the novel, and to demonstrate he was capable of writing as well in the longer form as he had in the short story.

If Aleksandrovskij and others were willing to forgive Gor'kij for his mistakes in his first attempts at the novel, Vladimir L'vov-Rogačevskij (1874-1930) was a little more critical of him. Comparing Gor'kij's short stories to his later works,[87] he pointed out that the writer's earlier works were more spontaneous and bore a more immediate relationship with his personal experiences than did his later ones. While L'vov-Rogačevskij considered characters like Staruxa Izergil', Makar Čudra, Konovalov and Mal'va a direct outcome of Gor'kij's experiences, he described the God-seeking Matvej, the Mother (Nilovna) and Tijnov as Gor'kij's own creation. Similarly, he observed that while Maksim is usually present in the *bosjak* stories only as a listener and learner, rarely engaging in propaganda, the main heroes of Gor'kij's novels became actively involved in espousing particular philosophies.

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[87] S.A. Vengerov, ed. *Russkaja literatura XX veka 1890-1910.* (Moscow: Mir, 1914) 201-234.

Not unexpectedly, therefore, L'vov-Rogačevskij not only supported the earlier contention by both Tolstoj and Čexov that fiction, rather than reality, constitute the main driving force in *Foma Gordeev*, but he also stressed the increased role of imagination in Gor'kij's work. For example, he found that if Gor'kij's early works were primarily factographic, later ones like *Mat'* and *Leto* were increasingly coloured and manipulated. He noted that although *Mat'* was based on actual events, Gor'kij quickly abandoned his factographic approach and turned Nilovna into another Staruxa Izergil', and transformed the people of Somov, the main participants in the novel, into triumphantly legendary figures that linked the worker Pavel intrinsically with the legendary Danko. Moreover, the critic observed that the major characters of the novel lapsed into lengthy triumphant speeches in praise of abstract "Man". L'vov-Rogačevskij called these speeches out of place in the working class milieu of the 1890s.

Commenting on Pavel Vlasov, L'vov-Rogačevskij pointed out that the insensitive "derevjannaja figura Pavla" had nothing in common with Gor'kij's early works. He considered this character an ascetic, who shared little in common with the heated fighters of the 1880s. Similarly, the critic disagreed with the pervasive presence of the intelligentsia bowing before working people in Gor'kij's work and argued that such forbearance is unusual for Gor'kij and completely out of step with the author that readers had come to love and respect. As evidence of the novel's weakness, L'vov-Rogačevskij cited a worker, who, after reading the book, noted that: "sladkoe v étoj povesti Gor'kogo ego niskol'ko ne umiljalo. Da i dejstvitel'no: vsjakij, vkusiv Gor'kogo, -- ne zaxočet

sladkogo."[88]

However, despite the shortcomings of *Mat'*, L'vov-Rogačevskij noted that the book would remain a favourite of working people, it having many scenes certain to touch them. In particular, the critic praised Gor'kij for his defence of the rights of ordinary people and argued that the writer's role in this direction was so profound and distinguished that even critics with no democratic tendencies admitted Gor'kij's powerful moral authority. Besides, in the face of a familiar unfavourable image of women in Russian literature, L'vov-Rogačevskij praised Gor'kij for presenting positive images of women in *Mat'*. He regretted that the novel had not yet been published in Russia.

While L'vov-Rogačevskij expressed satisfaction that Gor'kij's art was guided by democratic principles, he worried that the writer's forays into publicist writings could adversely affect his literary career. He described Gor'kij as one of the few Russian writers, whose loyalty to Russia was evident. To back this claim, he cited Blok's assessment of Gor'kij in *Zolotoe runo* as "the ultimate expression of Russia". More particularly, L'vov-Rogačevskij praised Gor'kij's language, which he considered truly representative of ordinary Russians. He pointed out that whereas modernist writers might look to Vladimir Ivanovič Dal' (1801-72) for guidance in deeply Russian style, Gor'kij himself embodied the language of ordinary people. Indeed, the critic believed that Gor'kij had found the appropriate language and deserved to be praised for it.

As noted above, critics had by this time begun identifying a mounting interest on the part of Gor'kij to include debates within his work. As a genre, the novel permitted

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[88] *Russkaja literatura XX veka 1890-1910*. (Moscow: Mir, 1914) 223.

him a wider scope for debate, and Gor'kij intensified his early tendency toward verbosity. The increased role of propaganda within Gor'kij's fiction of the post-*bosjak* era makes A. Skabičevskij's comments on *Foma Gordeev* particularly relevant to the debate about contemporary views on the writer.

In "Maksim Gor'kij -- Očerki i rasskazy, Dva toma Spb, 1898g.",[89] Skabičevskij pointed out that the major shortcomings of the novel included lengthy speeches, long moral lectures and bookishness far beyond the understanding and capacity of its interlocutors. Nevertheless, not unlike the majority of his contemporaries, he acknowledged that these shortcomings of the novel are offset by areas of first class achievement. For example, contrary to the view of the majority of critics, Skabičevskij considered Ignat Matveevič Gordeev, the father of the protagonist of the novel. He described him as the most successful character in the work, and noted that in contrast to the uncoordinated manner in which Gor'kij presented Foma Gordeev, his description of Ignat revealed a systematic approach to the latter's development from childhood to death. Skabičevskij remarked that if Gor'kij's characters were concrete individuals up to this point, with the introduction of Ignat Gordeev, he moved towards the typical and offered a type that represented a certain class and time. As a result, the critic recognised in Ignat a representative of the Volga merchant class, and a symbolic Russian historical figure, who combined the mixed characteristics of the Novgorod trading community and traits of certain Russian Czars.

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[89] A. Skabičevskij, *Kritičeskie étjudi, publističeskie očerki, literaturnye xarakteristiki v dvux tomax.* TII, (St. Petersburg: Ju.N. Erlix, 1903) 862-894.

Skabičevskij compared Gor'kij's portrait of Ignat favourably with characters such as Sergej Aksakov's old man Bagrov, Gončarov's Grandma Berežkova and Pečerskij's Kuralesov and stressed the ability of Gor'kij to allow his characters to develop without authorial interference. He pointed out that this objectivity made it possible for Gor'kij to show Ignat in a well-rounded manner. For example, Skabičevskij observed that while Gor'kij presented Ignat as a well-bred and cultured person, he did not hide his callousness towards the peasants who worked for him.

While Skabičevskij remained impressed with Gor'kij's ability to lay bare the two sides of Ignat Gordeev, he rejected his rash connection to Nietzsche in the process as inappropriate. Pointing out that Ignat owed his success to his good health and good sense rather than to his superhuman qualities, Skabičevskij charged that Gor'kij's attempt to attribute Ignat's success to his superhuman qualities resulted from his desire to introduce into the work his pet idea of how the strong are destined to dominate society. Instead, Skabičevskij observed in the ideology of Gor'kij's characters the age-old attempts by the Russian intelligentsia to find the origins of the strong personality. As a result, he considered Gor'kij's efforts to be a continuation of the same quest.

Skabičevskij also argued that most of Gor'kij's early characters, from Čelkaš and Konovalov to Mal'va and Izergil', demonstrate a certain attitude which is incompatible with their nature and social standing. He criticized Gor'kij for promoting the image of the superman in his characters and pointed out that the pursuit of Nietzschean philosophy in the writer's work detracted from the rather elaborate description of pre-Reform merchant life on the Volga. Nevertheless, to Gor'kij's credit, Skabičevskij compared the writer's

Volga scenes favourably with those found in *Vasilij Terkin* by Boborikin -- a Volga native.

This rather mixed view of *Foma Gordeev* both as a continuation of Gor'kij's old themes and a break from his immediate literary past found further expression in the first full-size book devoted to Gor'kij's work by Andreevič.[90] Describing the novel as a correlate of Gor'kij's *bosjak* stories, Andreevič observed that, like Gor'kij's earlier heroes, there is a certain emptiness in Foma although the latter differs significantly from his predecessors both physically and financially. Citing the haphazard presentation of Foma's personality, Andreevič accused Gor'kij of exaggerating the dramatic process in the novel and pointed out that Foma is not only lonely and spontaneous, but even borders on madness at the end of the novel. Like other contemporaries, Andreevič expressed dissatisfaction at the ending of the novel and charged that Gor'kij was inconsistent in showing the transformation of Foma's life.

Yet, unlike the majority of early commentators of Gor'kij's work, who criticised the highly philosophical nature of his characters, Andreevič defended Gor'kij against accusations of intellectualism and western philosophical influences. He argued, instead, that Gor'kij is first and foremost a lyrical poet whose work sought to find answers to the meaning of life. Subsequently, he noted that the importance of his contribution to Russian literature lies not in whether or not his heroes are real or unreal, but in the opportunity they offer readers to follow the wanderings of the human soul, their spontaneous protests

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[90] Evgenij Solov'ev (Andreevič), *Kniga o Maksime Gor'kom i A.P. Čexove*. (St. Petersburg: A.E. Kolpinskij, 1900) 259 pages.

and their fight against narrow-mindedness. Andreevič praised Gor'kij for transforming an otherwise ethnographic work into a highly lyrical novel in which exploration of the human soul is played out in an unresolved drama.

It should be mentioned here that while Andreevič's defence of Gor'kij's philosophical stance cannot be dismissed as entirely biased, it should be looked at in the context of the on-going polemics of the day. Important though Andreevič was both as a respected critic and an editor, he was not impartial to Gor'kij's literary and political fate. After all, he not only teamed up with Posse to publish and promote Gor'kij's early work, he also shared many of the radical views that were professed in Gor'kij's work. Thus, it could be argued that in spite of the high regard with which Andreevič was held in the literary community, as an adamant supporter of Gor'kij, he could not be entirely objective especially discussing Gor'kij's philosophical and ideological views.

While it is sometimes easy, as in the case of Andreevič, to attribute the conflicting reviews of Gor'kij's work to personal preferences, the problem is more complex than it would appear at first sight. For example, a similar ambiguity prevailed in the comments of some of the most respected critics of the time, including A. Bogdanovič. Calling the first part of *Foma Gordeev* a well-thought out work in his first reaction to the novel, Bogdanovič, who wrote extensively about Gor'kij's early works, observed in "Krepnuščij talant"[91] that the novel was not only promising, but further testified to Gor'kij's talent. He observed that Gor'kij gave special attention to the language of the novel. Considering this latter a sign of improvement and growth, he also pointed out that thematically, *Foma*

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[91] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 146-158.

Gordeev marked Gor'kij's break from his traditional tramp characters to merchant surroundings, where he attempted to show the physical and moral struggles among the entrepreneurs of this Volga community.

Commenting on the main hero of the novel, Bogdanovič found Foma a particularly impressive personality, who was unable to put his energies to work in his surroundings. He observed that, unlike others around him, Foma sought to understand the meaning and purpose of life. While Bogdanovič admitted that as a literary type Foma was not new, he pointed out that the setting here differed from that of previous types. Attributing Foma's idleness to his surroundings, where emphasis is put on money and power, Bogdanovič regarded him as a representative of the best human forces in the struggle against filth and stagnation. Subsequently, despite uncertainty about the direction Foma's energies and protest would lead him, Bogdanovič commended Gor'kij highly for a realistic portrait of his main character and his surroundings.

Nevertheless, like the majority of his contemporaries, Bogdanovič expressed disapproval with the second part of *Foma Gordeev* as he was unable to reconcile the tragic end of Foma with the healthy Foma in the first part of the novel. Describing the ending of the novel as unrealistic and unexpected even for a writer like Gor'kij, the critic attributed Foma's failure as a literary character to the fact that he was a repetition of Ostrovskij's Lubin Torsov. Bogdanovič reproached Gor'kij for failing to take his hero beyond Ostrovskij's. The critic noted that since a lot had changed since Ostrovskij this was a grave mistake.

While, on the whole, Bogdanovič found *Foma Gordeev* lacking in Gor'kij's usual clarity and less artistic than one would expect of Gor'kij, he refused to blame him for failing to provide a "positive hero". On the contrary, he asserted that Foma's failure was clearly a result of the inability of Russian writers to create positive characters. Arguing that Gor'kij could not be blamed for a weakness he shared with others, Bogdanovič noted that conditions in Russia did not provide the proper material for a "positive" hero. He observed that, to Gor'kij's credit, Foma's personality contained initial elements that, under more favourable conditions, were capable of maturing into rare beauty and strength.

With respect to weaknesses in the novel, it is interesting to note the spirited defence Bogdanovič put up on behalf of Gor'kij. While he pointed out the deficiencies of the work, he was careful not to blame Gor'kij for any serious lapses, especially in style. Instead, like his contemporaries, he explained away the difficulties Gor'kij then experienced by claiming that they were not unique to him. It is important to note that such justifications would make it easier for supporters of the writer to explain away his weaknesses both then and later.

This same belief that the ending of *Foma Gordeev* and Gor'kij's presentation of Foma were not a total failure was echoed especially by N. Gekker in his article "Dvadcat' šest' i odna."[92] While Gekker maintained in this article that generally unfavourable contemporary assessments of the ending of *Foma Gordeev* were a matter of taste and cannot be argued. He pointed out, however, that the almost unanimous attempt to tie Gor'kij's success exclusively to the *bosjak* stories while denying him success as a novelist

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[92] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 210-214.

was hurried and unjustified. For example, he reminded his readers that while many critics claimed that in *Foma Gordeev* Gor'kij took on subjects outside his domain and were, therefore, beyond his competence, they had also pointed out that the young writer had time to correct his mistakes. In particular, Gekker accused *Russkaja mysl'* of this double standard and pointed out that despite the mass of literature available on Gor'kij's work, little had been done to understand the writer.

Citing an article in *Žizn'*, which portrayed Gor'kij's talent as good only for depicting tramps and people of the like, Gekker argued that, while the writer indeed had no equal in this area, it would be wrong to limit his achievements to only one aspect of his work. Instead, he maintained that despite the success with which Gor'kij treated the *bosjak* figure, the *bosjak* episode was only transitional in a literary path which was leading to a greater focus on the lives of working people.

It is probably in light of the above comments and with the desire to show that the working man was Gor'kij's ultimate objective that Gekker examined *Mužik*, a work that more than any at the time featured the role of working people in Gor'kij's art. To this end, in "O *Mužike* g. Gor'kogo",[93] he described the publication of *Mužik* as an important literary event and compared it favourably with Tolstoj's *Resurrection*. The critic pointed out that the importance of the work lay in Gor'kij's treatment of a new type of peasant -- the peasant-intelligent -- whose world view and psychology were attracted by the attention of many contemporary writers. While Gekker noted that the peasant-intelligent figure was not new to Russian literature, he pointed out a significant shift in

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[93] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 216-222.

attitude in *Mužik*, which allowed Šebuev, the hero of the novel, to recognize and cherish his links with ordinary people.

Gekker considered Šebuev a rare positive hero and pointed out that while the latter was no Konovalov or Orlov, like them, he belonged to the best sector of society. Despite the similarity, however, he observed that Šebuev differed from Gor'kij's early characters in the sense that he did not share their egoism and high opinion of themselves, nor did he ever idealize himself or proclaim himself a hero. As a result, Gekker pointed out that while Šebuev lived with the intelligentsia and took part in their daily activities, he distinguished himself by adopting his own personal approach to a lot of issues. For example, Gekker stressed Šebuev's rejection of the dualism of thought and emotion as well as the intelligentsia's pessimism and doubt. Instead, he regarded life as a process of creating ideas and new forms.

Gekker commented on the ending of *Mužik* in a follow up to the first article called "Ešče o *Mužike*".[94] In it, he, like Bogdanovič, blamed the nebulous and probably unsatisfactory ending of the story on the general difficulty among Russian writers to create a positive hero; this having been a real test even for some of the best minds in Russian literature. Just as in "Dvadcat' šest' i odna",[95] where Gekker argued that unfavourable assessments of the ending of *Foma Gordeev* were a matter of taste and could not be resolved, he noted that the huge volume of publications devoted to Gor'kij's work and the large number of critics involved in its study not only showed the

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[94] *Kritičeskie stat'i*, 1901: 223-232.

[95] Ibid., 210-214.

multiplicity of readings and interpretations of the writer's work, but also testified to his talent and originality.

Refuting charges against Gor'kij of exaggeration and character idealization, Gekker argued that Šebuev neither exaggerated nor sentimentalized his experiences. Meanwhile, he pointed out that Gor'kij's new peasant-*intelligent* figure represented just another form of his tramp character. As a result, the critic maintained that Šebuev was an improvement of the latter as he represented a clearer and more complete type. Even more significantly, Gekker credited Gor'kij with being the first Russian writer to introduce the reader to the internal world of the underground, and by so doing effectively, the critic argued, Gor'kij had put an end to long and speculative arguments about this little known subject.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, near unambiguous picture of the controversy over Gor'kij's first novel, it is worth considering yet another voice which sought to examine Gor'kij's work from a social and religious perspective. A religious personality by profession, T.S. Petrov used the epigram "Brat'ja pisateli, v našej sud'be čto-to ležit rokovoe"[96] from Nekrasov not only as the title for his work, but also to argue that writers are a chosen minority who have a duty to lead and direct other members of society. Accusing Gor'kij of failing to show leadership in his writing, Petrov compared the real life dilemma of Gor'kij himself with the failure of Foma and Il'ja in *Foma Gordeev* and *Troe* respectively to deal successfully with the difficulties in their lives. He maintained that Il'ja represented another side of Foma, and picked on the symbolism of his tragic death as proof of Gor'kij's own lot.

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[96] T.S. Petrov, *Brat'ja pisateli*. 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: Voščinskij, 1904) 3.

Moreover, Petrov argued that Gor'kij's inability to rise up to the divine duty of providing leadership to his readers left him with the abominable Nietzschean alternative. It was the discussion on Nietzschean elements in Gor'kij's work that provided Petrov the best opportunity to criticize the author. For example, Petrov ranked human beings between divinity and zoologism, and argued that Gor'kij's main characters were subhuman. Consequently, he asserted that characters like Mal'va and Čelkaš, who are representative of the protagonists in Gor'kij's early stories, have nothing in common with the "superman", whom he considered divine.[97] Much like Filosofov, Petrov, who argued the need for Russian literature to revive the tradition of Puškin and Lermontov, chastised Gor'kij for failing to put his talent to the service of society.

While the views expressed by Petrov may be considered too general in nature, their vagueness in regard to specific aspects of Gor'kij's writing is not unusual in literary criticism of the time. An overall survey of the work of the main participants in the debate reveals that literary issues were not always central to many of the commentaries under discussion. Instead, they served as a *raison d'être* for a broad range of interests and views, which sometimes had little in common with the real nature of Gor'kij's literary art. It bears pointing out after all that at the time in Russia, linguists and cultural anthropologists never really separated their respective fields from that of "literature".

Meanwhile, if the multiplicity of views presented here are not exclusively relevant to Gor'kij's early novels, they certainly reflect the broad spectrum of contemporary views of the writer's work after 1900. It is arguably a tribute to Gor'kij that the repertoire of

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[97] Ibid., 12-15.

critics who commented seriously on his work ranged from Marxists and moderates like Andreevič and Bogdanovič, to conservatives and even religious zealots like Filosofov and Petrov. Even more significant for a literary discussion of this nature, the views expressed in these individual articles come across as equally balanced for and against Gor'kij's creative skills.

Unlike reactions to Gor'kij's early stories which weighed to one side, contemporary reactions to the writer's early novels allow one to isolate more than one trend. Firstly, and probably in anticipation of things to come, these novels became the most controversial of all his work. This was primarily because of their subject matter and Gor'kij's approach for his novels. Gor'kij not only became more selective and specific in his choice of material, his presence in his characters became increasingly perceptible as he attempted to influence the direction of events in his work through direct authorial intervention. The interferences Tolstoj and Čexov had already sensed in some of Gor'kij's most successful stories had become more rampant and were frequently cited in critical studies by the end of the century as the writer took on more controversial and topical issues. Because this authorial intrusiveness in the conduct of his major personalities was generally found to be too personalized and consequently unartistic, Gor'kij's novels and novellas became the least appreciated aspect of his creative work.

Secondly, it would appear from all indications that the controversial nature of the subject matter in Gor'kij's novels made them less attractive to many critics of the day. As Gippius intimated in her diaries, the fear of being labelled must have made the writing of a critique of Gor'kij's novels less attractive. It is also possible that critics who, despite

the preponderance of the first person narrator in many of his early stories, preferred to remember the young writer as an impartial and objective story teller of the last decade of the nineteenth century did not bother to take on the new challenge of reassessing Gor'kij in the period when he wrote his first novels. The claim of these critics respecting the allegedly impartial and objective nature of Gor'kij's earlier work despite the usually subjective nature of its narrator is indicative of the lack of rigour Russian critics then displayed in addressing the first-person narration.

Irrespective of a number of positive trends that were isolated in Gor'kij's shift from the short story form to the novel genre by critics participating in the debate on Gor'kij's place in Russian life and culture, response to his novels fell below that of the preceding period. This was due especially to attempts by contemporary critics to measure Gor'kij's novels against his short stories, which were adjudged to be overwhelmingly successful. The absence of new parameters within which Gor'kij's novels could be discussed accounted partly for their rather poor reception.

Indeed, these works were not only regarded as less artistically accomplished and lacking the spontaneity associated with the writer's short story period, they were also noted to include numerous extra-literary elements. In paticular, the critics claimed that Gor'kij's novels lacked his usual originality and clarity and suffered from such features as over-elaboration, bookishness and even journalese. There was general agreement among the critics that these weaknesses took away from the artistic merits of Gor'kij's novels.

Thus, while Gor'kij may have sought to establish himself as a successfully well-rounded writer by venturing into the area of the novel after his initial success with both

the short story and early dramatic works, the controversy that dogged this enterprise from its inception and the attendant decrease in interest in his novels by contemporary critics render problematic the assessment of his early success (or failure) in the novel. Be that as it may, his novels and novellas cannot be dismissed as totally insignificant to both Russian literature and culture inasmuch as they reflect a period in his creative development, while successfully registering a historical moment in Russian life and literary culture at the time. Nevertheless, a comparison of the three major areas in which Gor'kij tried his hands as a creative writer clearly shows the novel as the least appreciated.

Chapter Seven

Contemporary Responses to Gor'kij's Dramatic Works (*Meščane* (1902), *Na dne* (1903), *Vragi* (1905) *Deti solnca* (1905) and *Dačniki* (1906).

The period between 1892 and 1899, when Gor'kij's career concentrated on short stories, established him as a successful writer and it remains the most memorable decade of his career even today. The succeeding years through the abortive Russian Revolution of 1905 and into 1906 played a major role both in buttressing his fame at home and propagating his work abroad. During this period his creative effort centred primarily on dramatic works and novels.

It can also be said that if Gor'kij achieved his fame in the initial years of his career through the medium of newspapers, journals and, later, collected volumes of his short stories, in the dramatic period, it was the theatre that offered him the greatest opportunity to touch the hearts and souls of both his countrymen and people abroad. Gor'kij's dramatic works and their performances in the theatre were particularly important for his reception outside Russia, for if Gor'kij was known at home primarily as a short story writer, abroad, it was his dramatic works that popularised his work and brought him instant renown.

At home, Gor'kij's popularity as a serious contender with the giants of Russian literature took another turn when he teamed up with Moskovskij Xudožestvennij Akademičeskij Teatr (MXAT), at the time the leading avantgarde theatre in Russia, to

stage a series of highly successful plays. While only a numerically small proportion of his pre-revolutionary output, Gor'kij's drama may have had the most impact on his literary career. *Meščane* (1902), *Na dne* (1903), *Vragi* (1905), *Deti solnca* (1905) and *Dačniki* (1906) not only permitted the writer to take a deeper look at Russian society, but also brought him closer to his audience. Through his drama Gor'kij had more direct contact with the Russian public. Since Gor'kij delighted in confronting his reader, the theatre provided him with the opportunity to provoke, torment and challenge his audience to face up to the most important issues of the day, be these obsolete traditions like "snoxačestvo", the dictatorial political system of Czarist Russia, etc.

The success of some of these plays not only established Gor'kij as the leading writer in Russia after Tolstoj and Čexov, but more importantly, reviews of them, including eyewitness accounts of how they were written and performed as well as popular reaction to them, provide us with direct insights into how the writer and his work were received. Of particular significance in this regard are the "immediate" accounts given by Gor'kij's close associates. These included fellow writers, actors, renowned professors and other leading figures of the day. Some of these were: N. Telešov, Vl. Nemirovič-Dančenko, K. Stanislavskij, Vasilij Ivanovič Kačalov (1875-1948), Tatjana Lvovna Ščepkina-Kupernik (dates n.a.) and Aleksandr Serafimovič (A.S. Popov, 1863-1949).

For presentational purposes, I have decided to divide the discussion on Gor'kij's dramatic works and their role in his reception in the pre-revolutionary period into two parts. The first, which deals with how the plays were performed and how audiences reacted to them, is made up primarily of the views of people who surrounded the writer

at the time. The second is made up of observations and reviews of contemporary professional literary critics. This arrangement is intended not only to provide the reader with two complementary perspectives on Gor'kij's dramatic works, but also to allow readers to take into account the overlap and mutual influence between "theatre-based" criticism and literary criticism.

It is appropriate to begin the discussion on this very important period in Gor'kij's creative life with his own assessment of his abilities and prospects as a dramatist. It must be mentioned here that after Gor'kij became acquainted with MXAT, he struck a vibrant chord with the actors and directors. Soon, it became clear that while MXAT needed him to boost its fortunes, Gor'kij also found it necessary to work closely with MXAT if his bid to be a dramatist was to succeed.

It was in this atmosphere of mutual need that Gor'kij approached Nemirovič-Dančenko, one of the directors and founders of MXAT with his first play: *Meščane*. The writer's anxieties over and satisfaction with this first attempt are revealed in the following letter he sent to Konstantin Petrovič Pjatnickij (1864-1938) soon after he had submitted his play to Nemirovič-Dančenko in 1901. In it, he wrote:

> ...ja... s čest'ju vyderžal predvaritel'noe ispytanie na čin dramaturga! (Beregis', Vil'jam Šekspir!) Govorju -- s čest'ju, -- ne stydjas' -- ibo upolnomočen moim ékzamenatorom skazat' bol'še. Vl. Nemirovič-Dančenko kljatvenno uverjal menja, čto p'esa -- udalas' i čto sim delom zanimat'sja ja sposoben. Ja emu verju... K tomu že on dal mne čestnoe slovo, čto esli p'esa okažetsja xuže, t.e. niže menja -- belletrista, on prjamo skažet mne -- "ne stav'te! ne goditsja!" A sejčas on govorit čto ja privyšel ego ožidanija i t.d. Vy znaete -- tri dnja ja ego ždal i čuvstvoval sebja mal'čiškoj, volnovalsja, bojalsja i voobšče duracki vel sebja. A kogda načal čitat' p'esu, to delal ogromnye usilija dlja togo, čtob skrit' ot Nemiroviča-Dančenko to smešnoe obstojatel'stvo, čto u menja drožal golos

i trjaslis' ruki. No -- sošlo![98]

Fortunately for Gor'kij, Nemirovič-Dančenko found *Meščane* a viable theatrical project and proceeded to work on performing it at the Akademičeskij Teatr. The timing of *Meščane*, which appeared only three years before the 1905 revolution, coupled with the temperament and persona of its author help serve as preconditions to a new era in Gor'kij's career. The play not only broke all existing sales records for a dramatic work in Russia, topping 60,000 copies in twelve different editions, it also won the 1901 Griboedov Prize which was conferred by The Society of Russian Theatrical Writers.[99] Despite heavy Czarist censorship, the play was staged in many cities and attracted enormous attention in part because it was often greeted with anti-Czarist demonstrations.

In his memoirs, Nemirovič-Dančenko provides an account of the hitherto unheard of success of the play and offers us first-hand insight into the meaning and status of *Meščane* when it first appeared:

> Pervaja p'esa Gor'kogo byla *Meščane*. Vsem nam očen' xotelos', čtob on napisal p'esu iz žizni bosjakov, -- byt, togda netronutyj i osobenno nas interesovavšij, no iz opasenija cenzury nado bylo načat' skromnee. Teatr ne uspel postavit' "Meščan" v Moskve, i prim'era dolžna byla sostojatsja v Peterburge, kuda teatr uže vyezžal každuju vesnu."
> "Na predstavlenijax "Meščan" ožidalis' demonstracii, vraždebnye velikomu knjazju. I, kak polagaetsja v takix slučajax, vyxod byl najden prostoj: zapretit' p'esu."
> "My načali xlopotat'. Mne byla ustroena audiencija u tovarišča ministra kn. Svjatopol'sk-Mirskogo, proslavivšegosja liberal'nymi proektami. Mne

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[98] *Arxiv A.M. Gor'kogo*, Vol. IV., (Moscow: Nauka, 1969) 38.

[99] N.L. Brodskij, ed. *M. Gor'kij v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, (Moscow: GIXL, 1955) 688.

udalos' ubedit'. P'esa byla razreščeno uslovno -- tol'ko dlja abonementov.[100]

Gor'kij's daring and willingness to provoke his audience, coupled with the suspicion and high-handedness with which the Czarist regime met his plays immersed both Gor'kij and his work in a political storm. Nemirovič-Dančenko recalled that the theatre in St. Petersburg was always filled with boisterous student crowds and that despite his personal appeals for calm a few nights prior to the staging of the play, anti-Czarist demonstrations followed its premiere. The *gendarmerie* not only stood outside the theatre at the premiere of *Meščane*, its officers also took places, ready to step in whenever necessary, behind the curtain. Reports of demonstrations and clashes with the police followed every performance of the play. Typical among these were the events of February 15, 1903 at Belostok, where one person was killed, several were injured and thirty people were arrested. As expected, subsequent presentations of the play were banned throughout Russia for fear of demonstrations.

Nemirovič-Dančenko's account is supported by V.I Kačalov's own version of events surrounding the initial performance of the play. Under the heading "Iz vospominanij. P'esy M. Gorkogo v MXATe, vstreči s M. Gor'kim, moja rabota nad roljami," [101] Kačalov recalled the enthusiasm with which MXAT awaited *Meščane*. Describing reaction from both the authorities and the public, he wrote:

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[100] N.L. Brodskij, ed. *M. Gor'kij v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, (Moscow: GIXL, 1955): 196.

[101] *Ežegodnik Moskovskogo Xudožestvennogo teatra, 1948*, (Moscow: 1951) 2: 53.

> V marte 1902 goda sostojalas' v Peterburge prem'era *Meščan* vo vremja gastrol'noj poezdki teatra. Teatral'naja cenzura vstretila imja Gor'kogo xmuro, naložila na p'esu svoju ruku, isključila iz nee rjad mest, v kotoryx usmotrela nedovol'stvo suščesvujuščim social'nym porjadkom. Razygravšijsja k tomu že episod postavil pod ugrozu samuju postanovku...."
> "Ministr vnutrenyx del Sipjagin zapretil postanovku "Meščan" i Vl.I. Nemirovič-Dančenko prišlos' mnogo borot'sja, čtoby dobit'sja otmeny étogo zapreščenija."
> "Na general'nuju repeticiju p'esy s'exalsja "ves' pravitel'stvennij Peterburg": velikie knjaz'ja, ministry, vysšie činovniki, vysšie voennye i policejskie činy."
> "V samom teatre, vokrug nego -- usilennyj narjad policii."
> "Razrešenie igrat' "Meščan" v Peterburge bylo dano tol'ko dlja abonementnyx -- p'jati ili šesti spektaklej. I čtoby v teatr ne pronikla publika neabonementnaja, gradonačalnik postavil narjady okolotočnyx i gorodovyx proverjat' bilety. Po nastojaniju Vl.I. Nemiroviča-Dančenko, objasnjavšegosja po étomu povodu s gradonačal'nikom Klejgel'som, na sledujuščix spektakljax uže stojali figury vo frakax i belyx nitjanyx perečatax. Éto byli pereodetye včerašnye gorodovye."
> ""Meščane" imeli v Peterburge i v Moskve bol'šoj i šumnij uspex -- i xudožestvennyj i obščestvenno-političeskij.[102]

While these accounts attest in themselves to the tremendous success *Meščane* enjoyed in the literary community and among theatrical audiences in the two cultural centres of the nation, additional evidence of the popularity of the play and its author can be seen in the Czarist regime's opposition to Gor'kij's work and to those who sought change. While the regime was antagonistic to Gor'kij and sought ways to prevent the dissemination of his ideas through censorship and police appearances at every performance of the play, the average reader and, in particular, opponents of the Czarist system gave the writer great support by purchasing thousands of copies of the work and flocking to theatres to see it performed. Similarly, supporters of Gor'kij also made him a celebrity and the embodiment of their dreams for change. Gor'kij became the

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[102] Ibid., 53.

beneficiary of both opposition and support because, while the writer's supporters sought deliberately to promote his place in contemporary cultural and political life, the regime did so inadvertently by focusing attention on him.

While *Meščane* was received enthusiastically, in large part, perhaps because it represented Gor'kij's debut as a dramatist, his next play established him both as a writer and more significantly a dramatist of national and international stature. *Na dne* not only silenced the sceptics, who doubted Gor'kij's abilities to achieve the stature of Tolstoj or Čexov, but also brought him fame from abroad as the play was received tumultuously in Western Europe. But before we discuss the reception of *Na dne* abroad and its effect on Gor'kij's image in general, it is important to consider the reaction it provoked in Russia itself.

Nikolaj Telešov, himself a writer and a member of the literary group Sreda, who first met Gor'kij in 1899, recalled that the first reading of the play took place before a crowd of some of Russia's most sophisticated literary élites. His description of this enthusiasm at that evening not only demonstrates the high regard in which Gor'kij was held among his contemporaries, but also underscores the success that awaited the play. Telešov wrote:

> V 1902 godu Gor'kij privez v Moskvu svoju vtoruju p'esu -- *Na dne* -- dlja Xudožestvennogo teatra. Pervoe čtenie ee proisxodilo u nas na "Srede". Čital sam Aleksej Maksimovič. Čital očen' xorošo i uvlekatel'no dlja slušatelej, -- osoberno rol' strannika Luki. Čitaja, on sam uvlekalsja. S xorošej, dobroj ulybkcj, veselo govoril on za Luku, tol'ko čto prišedšego v nočležku bosjakov, s xotomkoj za plečami:
> -- "Dobrogo zdorovja narod čestnoj!"
> -- "Byl čestnoj, da pozaprošloj vesnoj", -- surovo otvečaet emu Bubnov, a Luka opjat' veselo i laskovo:

> -- "Mne vse ravno, ja i žulikov uvažaju. Ni odna bloxa ne ploxa: vse černen'kie, vse prygajut. Tak-to!"
> "A inogda golos ego načinal drožat' ot volnenija, i kogda Luka soobščil o smerti otmučivšejsja Anny, avtor smaxival s glaz neždanno nabežavšuju slezy. Mečtalos' emu, očevidno, kak éto dolžno vyjti na scene, kogda kto-to skažet:
> -- "Dajte pokoj Anne, žila ona očen' trudno..."
> Mnogim togda kazalos' čto slova Luki o stradanijax Anny otnosilis' ne tol'ko k Anne, no i ko vsej izmučennoj carizmom Rossii, ko vsemu trudovomu narodu. Tak po krajnej mere ponimali ego slezy nekotorye svideteli étogo čtenija iz miro artističeskogo.
> "Na étom čtenii, pomimo svoix, bylo mnogo priglašennyx artistov i literatorov. Vspominajutsja: V.I. Kačalov, O.I. Knipper, pisatel'nicy Krandievskaja, Verbickaja, Ščepkina-Kupernik, krupnye žurnalisty, vrači, juristy, učenye, xudožniki. Naroda bylo množestvo: sideli na podokonnikax, stojali v drugix komnatax, gde bylo vse slyšno, no ničego ne bylo vidno. Čtenie proisxodilo v kvartire Leonida Andreeva. Uspex byl isključitel'nim. Jasno, čto p'esa stanet sobytiem. Tak ono i slučilos', -- osobenno, kogda Lukoju vyšel na scenu Moskvin, baronom -- Kačalov, Satinym -- Stanislavskij.[103]

Obviously, the play was received very favourably as attested to by the following passage from Telešov's memoirs where he comments on the reception of its premiere. He wrote:

> Vospominaetsja soveršenno isključitel'nyj uspex étoj p'esy na pervom ee predstavlenii v dekabre 1902 goda. V publike mnogo vidnyx pisatelej, artistov, xudožnikov, obščestvennyx dejatelej, populjarnyx professorov i izvestnyx kritikov. V roljax vystupajut samye ljubimye, samye vidnye artisty MXATa: Stanislavskij, Moskvin, Kačalov, Knipper, Lužskij, Andreeva, Višnevskij, Gribunin. Svjaz' zritel'nogo zala so scenoj ustanovilas' s pervoj že minuty, s pervogo slova: "Nu, dal'še!", skazannogo baronom (Kačalovym). Každaja dal'nejšaja fraza artistov, každoe novoe pojavlenie dejstvujušij lic upročivalo étu živuju svjaz'. Xočetsja privesti v svideteli samogo K.S. Stanislavskogo, kotoryj pisal čto spektakl' étot imel "potrjasajuščij uspex." Avtor byl vyzvan svyše dvadcati raz."
> "Po okončanii spektaklja Gor'kij priglasil vsex učastvovavšix, a takže

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[103] N. Telešov, *Zapiski pisatelja*, (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1948) 102-103.

> mnogix pisatelej i druzej na užin v restoran "Érmitaž". Sobralos' čelovek okolo sta. U vsex pripodnjatoe nastroenie, vse radostny, vse pozdravljajut drug druga. Vo vremja užina, rastrogannyj čudestnim ispolneniem, Gor'kij podxodil k artistam, čokalsja s nimi i, počti skvoz' slezy radosti, govoril im šutlivo:
> -- Čerti vy étakie, kak vy xorošo igrali!
> Kačalov ne ostavil étogo bez otklika i tonom barona iz "Dna" gromko otvetil:
> -- Nu, -- dal'še!.."
> "No Moskvin sejčas že vozrazil, tože iz frazy tonom Luki:
> -- Ty pogodi, milyj, ne v slove delo, a počemu slovo govoritsja..."
> "I pošli citaty vo vsex koncax zala iz tol'ko čto sygrannyx rolej v otvet na privetsvija avtora.[104]

An even more precise and convincing reaction that demonstrates the satisfaction of the first audience with Gor'kij's *Na dne* is reflected by Konstantin Stanislavskij when he recorded in his memoirs that at the end of the performance Gor'kij earned the applause of the audience, even though the play was directed against most of them. He observed that the importance of *Na dne* and the success of Gor'kij's plays, in general, could be measured by the fact that of the four plays performed by MXAT during the 1902-03 season, two belonged to Gor'kij. The other two were works by Tolstoj and Ibsen. Indeed, Stanislavkij's own account of the success of *Na dne* confirms a similarly high opinion of the play when he wrote:

> Spektakl' imel potrjasajuščij uspex. Vyzyvali bez konca režisserov, vsex artistov i osobenno velikolepnogo Luku -- Moskvina, prevosxodnogo barona -- Kačalova, Nast'ju -- Knipper, Lužskogo, Višnevskogo, Burdžalogo i, nakonec samogo Gor'kogo. Očen' bylo smešno smotret', kak on vpervye pojavljajas' na podmostkax, zabyl brosit' papirosu, kotoruju deržal v zubax, kak on ulybalsja ot smuščenija, ne dogadyvajas' o tom, čto

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[104] Telešov, 1948: 104-105.

nado vynut' papirosu izo rta i klanjatsja zriteljam.[105]

Stanislavskij also pointed out that following the success of *Na dne* Gor'kij became the hero of the day ("stal geroem dnja") and was pursued in public by hordes of his admirers. In addition, he commented that, overwhelmed by the attention, Gor'kij tried to explain to his admirers that he did not deserve such admiration. But this, according to Stanislavskij, only heightened the interest in him.

Another eyewitness account of the success enjoyed by *Na dne* and its author comes from Kačalov, one of the leading actors of MXAT, who played the baron in the play. Commenting that the play enjoyed tremendous success and touched a chord among the audience from the very beginning, he recalled:

> ...P'esa prinimalas', kak p'esa-burevestnik, kotoraja predviščala grjaduščuju burju i k bure zvala. Šumnym ovacijam i vyzovam, kazalos', ne budet konca -- po adresu ispol'nitelej, režisserov -- K.S. Stanislavskogo i Vl.I. Nemiroviča-Dančenko -- i osobenno avtora. On vyxodil na scenu nemnogo skonfužennyj, s papiroskoj v zubax i ne klanjalsja publike, a tol'ko smuščenno i v tože vremja lukavo-veselo i vyzyvajušče smotrel v zritel'nyj zal. Kogda, nakonec, v poslednij raz okončatel'no zakryl'sja zanaves, my vse -- učastniki spektaklja -- stali obnimat' avtora, blagodarili za sčast'e razdeljat' s nim takoj ogromnyj uspex. My byli po nastojaščemu sčastlivy. My uže byli vljubleny v svoi roli.[106]

The sentiment underscored by the above quotations are summed up neatly in Ščepkina-Kupernik's memoirs about her life in the theatre. An actress at MXAT herself, she not only has provided the reader with a contemporary reaction to *Na dne*, but also

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105 K.S. Stanislavskij, *Moja žizn' v iskusstve*, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1962) 316.

106 *Ežegodnik Moskovskogo Xudožestvennogo teatra, 1948*, (Moscow: 1951) 2: 53.

argued that the play marked a new beginning in the life of MXAT. According to her:

> Nastojaščee vpečatlenie razorvavšejsja bomby proizvelo *Na dne*. Zritelja slovno bičom xlestnulo... My uvidali, čto v to vremja, kak v ujute otživajuščix pomeščič'ix usadeb i provincial'nyx domov s mezoninami ešče zvučat šopenovskie val'sy, razdajutsja poétičeskie slova i proxodjat dramy ljubvi, tam, vnizu, "na dne", idet nastojaščaja tragedija zadavlennyx, otčajavšixsja ljudej, i v étoj tragedii vinovat tot samyj stroj, kotorij daet tam, naverxu, zvučat' šopenovskim val'sam...
> "Na dne" prozvučalo nastojaščim voplem o spravedlivosti. Mnogie posle nego ne spali nočej..."
> "I zritel' dumal nevol'no:
> Tak vot čto na dne našej žizni? Tak dal'še nel'zja! Tak dal'še ne možet prodolžat'sja!"
> "I prošumela éta p'esa nad Rossiej nastojaščim burevestnikom.[107]

If the above accounts concentrate on demonstrating the popularity of *Na dne* in Russia, it should be emphasized that this acclaim was not limited to Russia. In fact, *Na dne* became the main instrument through which Gor'kij won over the West as a major Russian writer. While some of his *bosjak* stories had reached the West both in the original and in translation, there is no evidence that they had established him as an important literary personality outside of his homeland. All this changed, however, with the publication of his plays in the first decade of this century. This was especially so when *Na dne* appeared in 1903. The play not only established Gor'kij's reputation as a playwright and psychological writer, but more importantly, it gave him the final push that put him on a par with giants of Russian literature like Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov.

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[107] T.L. Ščepkina-Kupernik, *Teatr v moej žizni*, (Moscow and Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948) 244-245.

Kačalov reported in his memoirs that by 1906 Gor'kij had become especially popular in Europe and America. He recalled that when MXAT arrived in Berlin that year to begin nation-wide performances of *Car' Fedor*, *Na dne* and *Deti solnca*, the latter two were already being staged there in German. As far as the personal popularity of Gor'kij in Germany was concerned, Kačalov wrote:

> V vitrinax knižnyx magazinov vystavleny byli ego knigi na nemeckom i russkom jazykax, ego bol'šie portrety, besčislennoe količestvo otkrytok. "Na dne" bylo postavleno Maksom Rejngardtom, togda ešče molodym, načinajuščim režisserom. ...Večer ustraivalsja v kakom-to bol'šom zale Šarlotenburga, kotoryj togda byl ešče okrainoj Berlina, so svoej demokratičeskoj publikoj, učaščimisja i rabočej intelligenciej. Pomnju, čto teatr byl prepolnen. Pomnju programmu étogo večera. Aleksej Maksimovič čital "Pesnju o sokole", Rejngardt na nemeckom jazyke monolog Luki iz "Na dne". Očen' popul'jarnyj togda v Germanii akter Šildkraut, tože po-nemecki, čital Gor'kovskuju "Vesennjuju melodiju", a ja čital "Burevestnika" i "Jamarku v Gol'tve". Pomju, kak gorjačo i šumno publika privetstvovala Gor'kogo, vstala pri ego pojavlenii. Tresk aplodismentov, kriki "Xox!" V teatre bylo mnogo russkix émigrantov. Konečno, ogromnoe bol'šinstvo nemeckoj publiki russkogo jazyka ne znalo i ne moglo ocenit' ni teksta, ni čtenija Alekseja Maksimoviča. Vsja éta publika napolnila teatr tol'ko dlja togo, čto by uvidet' živogo Gor'kogo i vyrazit' svoju ljubov' k Gor'komu -- xudožniku i političeskomu borcu.[108]

Kačalov noted the frantic efforts by guards of the Crown Prince Wilhelm and his family, who were in attendance, to catch a glimpse of Gor'kij through their binoculars. Such a tumultuous reception by non-speakers of Russian, large gatherings of the émigré community and even members of high Russian society, who resented Gor'kij's open affiliation with the Social Democrats under Lenin, offer a convincing picture of the success of his plays and their overall impact. In all, Kačalov's observations and the

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108 *Ežegodnik Moskovskogo Xudožestvennogo teatra, 1948,* (Moscow: 1951) 2: 53.

unique contribution made by contemporaries like Stanislavskij, Nemirovič-Dančenko and Ščepkina-Kupernik, who worked closely with Gor'kij in staging his plays provide us with a wider background against which the writer's popularity and image in Russian literature can be assessed.

Nevertheless, it must beremembered that while the sentiments expressed by eye-witness accounts of the overwhelming success of Gor'kij's early plays, manifested in the quotations above, correspond to the overall assessment of this period in the author's career, these accounts cannot be taken at face value. They were written much later when Gor'kij had been accepted as a Soviet icon. There is therefore a strong possibility that while they approximated what actually happened in the early 1900s, they may have been written in the spirit of the new times.

While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Gor'kij owed much of his initial praise and recognition in Russian literature and criticism to foreign perceptions of his work, it is true that reactions to his work from abroad had some real impact on the way he was evaluated at home, especially in his post-short story period. The effects of this trend were twofold. In the first place, favourable impressions about his writing from the West confirmed and buttressed the generally positive opinions of him held by contemporary critics at home. Secondly, and even more importantly for his overall image, these opinions tended to influence how Gor'kij was perceived in Russia for local opinion began to mirror what was said about him abroad. Gor'kij not only became an important representative of Russian art and culture abroad. As his theatrical pieces, in particular, began to attract the attention of Western audiences, reaction from his foreign admirers

manifested itself both in his personal and political life.

Gor'kij's works were translated into several Western European languages with ensuing reviews by prominent literary critics. The latter included the Danish critic Georg Brandes (1842-1927), whose views enjoyed tremendous respect in Russia, and the Count Melchior Eugène de Voguë (1848-1910), a Frenchman and friend of Turgenev's, who had sojourned in Russia. Others were the French critic, Serge Perskij, who wrote a preface to the French translation of Gor'kij's *Step'* and the German translator Shultz, whose visit to Russia to acquaint himself with Gor'kij coincided with the writer's release from prison in 1901. It was of particular importance to Gor'kij that popular opinion in the West began to influence the way the Czarist regime reacted to him in Russia. A clear example of this was the campaign mounted by his supporters in the West to liberate him after his arrest by Czarist authorities for complicity in the failed revolution of 1905.

While *Na dne* spearheaded Gor'kij's conquest of European audiences, it was only one of several successful plays he wrote in the early 1900s. *Meščane*, *Dačniki* and *Vragi* also played a contributing, if lesser, role. However, it is important to note that *Na dne* stood out as a particularly successful play both in the eyes of critics and ordinary theatre audiences. The success of this play was borne out by the fact that it ran in certain European cities on a daily basis for over a year and a half. Little wonder, therefore that the bulk of critical reaction to Gor'kij's dramatic works focused primarily on this play. Thus, while some mention is made of his other early plays such as *Meščane*, *Dačniki* and *Vragi* in the body of work under consideration in the second half of this chapter, the overwhelming amount of material is devoted to *Na dne*. The near unanimous

concentration on *Na dne* makes the task of assessing the impact of the writer's dramatic works on his overall early image a little more difficult. This notwithstanding, I shall endeavour to reconstruct in this section the critical debate surrounding the formative role of Gor'kij's dramatic works for his early image.

Before embarking on a full discussion of contemporary critical opinions on Gor'kij's dramatic works, it is important to describe briefly the contributors to the debate and its nature. Reviews of Gor'kij's plays not only paralleled critical opinions on his short stories and first novel, they were, understandably enough, a continuation of the same process.

Firstly, the most frequent and authoritative views came from critics that had long made a name for themselves in contemporary Russian criticism. A quick survey of the critics commenting on Gor'kij's short stories and other works reveal that the same names recur everywhere in the compilation of local and international reaction to his literary career. His plays were no exception in this sense as they were reviewed by such critics as Innokentij Fedorovič Annenskij (1843-1912), Dmitrij Nikolaevič Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij (1853-1920), Andreevič (Evgenij Solov'ev) and Evgenij Aleksandrovič Ljackij (1868-1942), to mention but a few.

Secondly, the major bibliographies of the time also show that the main contributors to the discussion continued to be the Marxists, the Moderates and the Conservatives. While the Moderates dealt primarily with the literary aesthetic merits and demerits of Gor'kij's plays, the other two defended or criticised him vehemently, depending on the ideological camp to which they belonged. Not surprisingly, critics and

literary personalities like Filosofov and Merežkovskij lined up against Andreevič and the Marxists, while Vengerov, for example, took a more balanced approach in his review of Gor'kij's work.

While ideology provided the *raison d'être* for the disagreement between the conservative and Marxist camps, it should be pointed out that literary criteria remained the basis upon which their arguments were structured. Reviewers of Gor'kij's work tried hard to give a semblance of literary legitimacy by making constant references to the particular texts under consideration. Even though one cannot assert that the two opposing groups avoided literary evaluations in their work, it bears stressing that they frequently drew a lot of non-literary considerations into the debate. At the same time, it must be pointed out that the degree of interference of extra-literary affairs in the debate varied from critic to critic and manifested itself most conspicuously in the work of contributors with little or no literary background. This is particularly the case with critics who preferred a sociological approach to literature.

While we have established that some of the views expressed by contemporary critics about Gor'kij appeared to be quite unrelated to the debate about his talent and literary skills, it must be remembered that early twentieth century Russian criticism had a strong tendency to mix the literary and non-literary. For example, biography became an essential part of the literary process, and was an important criterion for many critics. Thus, while it would seem, from a purely literary perspective, that some of the arguments used in the debate are not a valid measure for the talent and skills of a writer, it must be kept in mind that the nature of contemporary literary criticism and the study of reception

and canonization make them as important (sometimes even more) than "purely" literary considerations. In fact, it can be asserted that the nature of contemporary Russian criticism is only an additional reason to take such arguments seriously.

But before we consider comments and observations from literary critics of the time, it would be appropriate to begin the review of Gor'kij's dramatic works with the remarks of the man from whom the author borrowed the structure of his plays. Čexov was one of the first to read Gor'kij's plays, and as in his other early works, the older writer offered suggestions and advice on ways to improve on *Meščane* and *Na dne* in the spirit of the mutual relationship that existed between the two writers. In three separate letters written in 1901 and 1902[109], Čexov suggested a reordering of the acts in *Meščane* such that the fourth act, which deals with the outlook of the characters in the play, be placed first. Similarly, he suggested the third act, which contained Tatjana's suicide and reactions to it, come last. This, Čexov argued, would allow the drama to shift its emphasis from social themes to concentrate on the relationships among the characters. Čexov also suggested reducing Teterev's role in favour of Nil's, whom he thought was overburdened with delivering the message of *Meščane* even though he did not come out as the leading figure in the play. Regarding *Na dne*, Čexov noted that the absence of the most important figures in the last act of the play made it boring and redundant. It bears stressing that Leonid Andreev, an early admirer and close associate of Gor'kij's at this time also noted

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[109] A.P. Čexov, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenii i pisem v tricati tomax: Pisma v dvenadcati tomax*. The first two letters which make references to *Meščane* appear in Vol. 10: 137-138 and 149 (letters of 13th and 23rd December 1901), while his remarks on *Na dne* appear in Vol. 11: 12 (letter of 29th July 1902).

the "actionless" nature of Gor'kij's plays, the absence of secondary roles in them as well as their lack of a centre.[110]

The structural concerns expressed by both Čexov and Andreev found further support in the comments of another critic. Described by later Marxist historians as a subjectivist impressionist critic,[111] I. Annenskij was one of the first to react to Gor'kij's dramatic works. He was a decadent impressionist poet whose main themes included pessimism, isolationism and dreams of "other-worldly" beauty. An admirer of Gor'kij's short stories, Annenskij considered *Na dne* a blend of realism and the mystic in one of two books called *Knigi otraženij*.[112] He described Gor'kij as the most expressive symbolist in Russian literature since Dostoevskij and remarked that while the realism in his work differed from that of Gončarov, Pisemskij and Ostrovskij, it reminded the reader of Dostoevskij. Annenskij observed that, as with Dostoevskij's heroes, the internal self and spiritual images of Gor'kij's characters in *Na dne* differ greatly from their external appearance. He also pointed out that the incompatibility between the internal life of Gor'kij's characters and their external appearance gave the writer's work a certain fictionality as well as a specific Russian colouring.

Despite the similarities Annenskij found between Dostoevskij and Gor'kij, he also stressed their differences. For example, he pointed out that while Dostoevskij considered

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[110] *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 72 (1965): 475.

[111] *Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. Vol. II, (Moscow: Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija, 1959) 462.

[112] I.F. Annenskij, *Kniga otraženij*. Vol. I, (St. Petersburg: Brat'ja Bašmakovy, 1906) 127-146.

Man an appendix to God, Gor'kij regarded Man as his own master. The critic also observed that if Dostoevskij admonished man to conform and listen to God, Gor'kij's man prided himself in the fight against earthly injustice. Despite these philosophical differences, Annenskij noted that both Dostoevskij and Gor'kij created characters who were not only interested in ideas, but also aroused the spiritual feelings of their readers. It is in the light of the latter comment that he stressed Gor'kij's concern not for the what, but the how and why of things.

Focusing his attention on *Na dne*, Annenskij called it a real drama of an unusual character. He described the play as being of a primarily social nature and reminded the reader that its plot is not new since it can be traced to the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus as well as to Shakespeare's Desdemona. Annenskij pointed out that Gor'kij's contribution in *Na dne* lay in his ability to translate the events and personalities described in it into a contemporary artistic context. Still on the artistic level, he pointed out that the plot of the play recedes into the background and allows Gor'kij to direct attention at particular real-life events and conditions. Similarly, the critic remarked that, unlike that of traditional drama, the focus of *Na dne* shifts from one spot to another, with attention, sometimes moving momentarily from personality to personality. Annenskij also observed that personal dramas come to the fore and merge from time to time as events unfold. Consequently, he stressed that the play has neither beginning nor denouement in the strict traditional sense. In spite of this, Annenskij insisted that *Na dne* reveals itself as a real artistic work, when carefully read.

With respect to some of the basic theatrical elements of the play, Annenskij noted that the raising of the curtain literally creates the space in which the action takes place. He pointed to a certain mysticism in *Na dne* that turns "normal" people into "former people" and stressed Gor'kij's ability to look deep into the individual's soul in order to locate elements which make well-placed people desert their families and jobs to join up with the tramps. In this regard, he compared Gor'kij's characters with those of Marlinskij (A.A. Bogdanov), but he observed that Gor'kij's work differed in that it was impossible to tell who would be the tramp among Gor'kij's characters or from whence he would come. Annenskij commended Gor'kij for showing that instincts capable of turning perfectly normal people into "former" people remain strong in society.

Commenting on the philosophical nature of the work, Annenskij concluded that Gor'kij was no moralist. Instead, he noted "individual'nost' Gor'kogo predstavljaet interesnejščuju kombinaciju čuvstva krasoty s glubokim skepticizmom."[113] Annenskij pointed out that "čuvstva krasoty" not only referred to Gor'kij's undisputed and masterly presentation of beautiful nature descriptions, but also to his ability to put a highly aesthetic stamp on rather messy events. The critic described Gor'kij's scepticism as "skepticizm, bodryj, večno ščuščij i žadnyj..." -- a scepticism of a special nature that demonstrated Gor'kij's impartiality. Annenskij stressed that, unlike the moralist writers, Gor'kij observed neither boundaries nor taboos, for he regarded nothing as too holy nor too sacred in his search for the truth.

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[113] Annenskij, 1906: 137-138.

Discussing characterization in the play, Annenskij argued that the personalities in *Na dne* are a continuation and improvement on Gor'kij's short-story protagonists. For example, he commented on Pepel's relationship to protagonists in the writer's earlier works. Annenskij observed that while Pepel is physically well-built and has a profession, he is also a thief. This last fact, Annenskij claimed, provided Pepel with leisure for thought. Annenskij noted that although a criminal, Pepel is nevertheless sensitive to the feelings of others. Similarly, the critic put Nataša on the same plane with Pepel and observed that, through her, Gor'kij presents the reader with a profile of the "modern soul" and a reflection of contemporary society. He praised Gor'kij for the way in which he portrayed her and maintained that Gor'kij's skill in the depiction of Nataša alone sufficed to put him among the great seers of the day.[114]

Picking up on earlier observations on the dichotomy of internal and external conflicts among Gor'kij's heroes, Annenskij examined the attitudes of Gor'kij's major characters in *Na dne* towards some of the most fundamental principles of life. He noted that the characters expressed scorn at the most sacred things in high society. For example, commenting on the place of work and family in the play, Annenskij pointed out that Bubnov not only deserted his job, he also rejected all commitment to his family. Furthermore, the critic pointed out that with the exception of Nastja, whom he considered a takeoff on Sonya Marmeladova and an almost fantastic figure, all the major characters in *Na dne* avoided work.

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[114] Annenskij, 1906: 140.

Further, Annenskij turned his attention to Luka and remarked the close affinities between Gor'kij and this character. He pointed out that, like Gor'kij, Luka was interested more in what people concealed in themselves than in people per se. While he remarked that Luka left behind only bitterness and victims in his attempts to console others, he acknowledged the importance of his role in the play, for he raised questions without which the lives of the inhabitants of the underground would be empty. Notwithstanding Annenskij's admiration for such a strong personality, the critic rejected the idea of the superhuman in Luka for its fetish-like nature.

Annenskij not only thought favourably of *Na dne* as a well conceived play, but also revealed his particular preference for what he perceived to be symbolist and impressionist elements in the work. In addition to praising Gor'kij for adequately dealing with the pertinent issues in the play, he also highlighted the writer's superb literary and compositional skills. More importantly, just as he did during Gor'kij's short-story years, Annenskij put Gor'kij well above the writer's peers. With respect to Gor'kij in his search for psychological insights, he chose to equate him with Dostoevskij. It can also be inferred from the frequent references to impressionist elements in Gor'kij's work that this was yet another way of modernizing Gor'kij and bringing him closer to Čexov, then the most respected writer of the time.

The same level of admiration for Gor'kij can be observed in a review of *Na dne* by D. Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij, a linguist and middle-of-the-road critic, who had already praised Gor'kij's literary skills as a short-story writer and a rising literary personality.

Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij observed that *Na dne* was the best of Gor'kij's plays.[115] He pointed out that *Na dne* caught the attention of many because it offered a rare opportunity to examine theatrically one of the most important issues of the time, namely "bosjačestvo". He argued that Gor'kij's contribution to this topic was particularly important since the literary perspective the writer provided helped throw light on the dark psychology of the tramp figure. Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij pointed out that through the characterization of his principal personae and the treatment of their psychology, Gor'kij offered a number of glimpses into the thinking of a social group that was normally considered as outcast.

Dividing Gor'kij's characters into two groups -- real outcasts like Pepel, Satin, Baron and the actor, on the one hand, and aspiring outcasts like Klešč and Bubnov, on the other, Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij praised Gor'kij for presenting two distinct categories of people, who, despite their troubled fate, never lost their humanity. Interestingly, the critic revealed striking similarities between Satin and Bubnov, who come from different backgrounds, and called the former the intelligent correlate of the peasant Bubnov.

Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij also noted the philosophical astuteness of Gor'kij's characters and observed that this was incompatible with their educational and social status. Like Annenskij, Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij noted the superman elements in the play when he pointed out that Satin's declamations on truth, lies and human dignity echo Nietzsche's ideas. The critic observed that by allowing characters like Satin to make

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115 L.O. Veinberg, ed. *Kritičeskoe posobie. Sbornik vydajušixsja statej russkoj kritiki za 100 let.* Vol. IV. 2nd ed. (Moscow: n.p., n.d) 207-218.

pronouncements in praise of human dignity and respect throughout his work, Gor'kij provided grounds for critics to attack him for putting such words in the mouths of people who had lost these same qualities. Nevertheless, he pointed out that a close look at Satin, for example, exonerates the writer from such criticism. Citing the old Russian saying "Vsjak o tom i govorit, čto u nego bolit", Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij argued that it was not unusual for people to speak about qualities they lacked. Besides, he believed that Satin's background equipped him sufficiently with the knowledge required to talk about respect and dignity as qualities common to all people irrespective of their condition.

Turning his attention to Luka and his role in the play, Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij recalled the interest the latter's appearance sparked. He highlighted Luka's success in holding the other characters in the play spellbound and noted that his importance in the work lay in his ability to direct the attention of the inmates to the qualities they had just lost. More significantly, Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij argued that while Luka's influence varied from character to character, he left his mark on the whole group -- as their concern, sympathy and support for each other demonstrate.

From the above, one can see that Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij dwelt on the psychological aspects of the play by emphasising Gor'kij's reliance on the internal motivations of his characters. While it is noteworthy that Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij praised the social aspects of *Na dne* which helped to shed light on the tramp figure, his main emphasis was focused on the relationship of the characters to each other and to their surroundings. Overall, it is appropriate to say that Gor'kij's first major dramatic work left a very favourable impression on Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij.

Andreevič also shares the enthusiasm with which *Na dne* was met by contemporary critics. An ardent supporter of Gor'kij and a literary historian and critic of note, Andreevič considered the play both as an educational experience and a sort of exercise in literary democratization.[116] He argued that in *Na dne* Gor'kij took his traditional audience into a world that differed significantly from their own. Andreevič pointed out that the writer thereby broke with common literary practice which centred only on the powerful and the strong. Instead, he noted that Gor'kij carried his search into the lives of the weak, the lowly and the hungry. He commended Gor'kij for this new approach, and argued that *Na dne* constituted a broadening of the literary sphere. As such, Andreevič thought it to be both as a personal achievement for Gor'kij and a useful contribution to Russian literature.

Andreevič had high praise for Gor'kij's talent and literary skills. However, he claimed that in *Na dne* Gor'kij had removed the elements of fatality and myth that usually surround his characters in favour of a realistic approach which gave his work real social value. He argued that by so doing, Gor'kij had diminished the artistic strength of the play. Nevertheless, the critic contended that Gor'kij salvaged the play artistically by shifting emphasis from the physical atrocities in it to the psychology of the heroes. Consequently, notwithstanding the undeniably horrible conditions in which the characters resided, the roots of their spiritual drama reached beyond the physical depths in which they lived. Not surprisingly, Andreevič considered this aspect of the play its greatest achievement and noted that through this approach, Gor'kij had avoided the danger of concentrating the

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[116] *Kritičeskoe posobie*, 1901: 218.

drama of *Na dne* on its sad elements.

Nevertheless, Andreevič also pointed out a number of weaknesses. For example, he noted that in spite of Gor'kij's success at character depth, he still would, very often, resort to the too familiar ratiocination and long speeches that one encounters in some of his earlier works. Structurally, Andreevič noted that the most important feature of *Na dne* is the absence of a plot. He noted in this regard that the rather blurred love affairs between Vasilisa and Pepel, on the one hand, and Pepel and Nataša, on the other, are completely overburdened with speeches and do not constitute a plot in any way. Similarly, he pointed out the abundance of long overblown exchanges that are not, he claimed, organic to the plot, action and conflict in the play. These, he found, thereby diminished the play's dramatic element.

Furthermore, while Andreevič contended that Gor'kij had devoted considerable attention to the psychology of his heroes, he argued that Gor'kij had failed to show their psychological specificity. In light of this, he argued that the author had brought out nothing new from the depths he had plumbed since his heroes are preoccupied with issues already highlighted in his earlier works. If Andreevič argued that Gor'kij had contributed to the artistic topography of Russian literature through his thorough and informative description of the "lower depths", he nevertheless concluded that Gor'kij's plays had failed to break new grounds psychologically. Additionally, like many other critics of the day, Andreevič pointed out that Gor'kij neither provided sufficient explanation for the internal reasons that drove his characters to the lower depths nor did he bring out the psychological effects resulting from the conditions there. This weakness, the critic

attributed to Gor'kij's idealization of his characters, who, under the influence of Gor'kij's decorative pen, lost their true identity.

Andreevič differed significantly from other contemporary commentators in his attitude toward Luka. He admitted that Luka plays an important role in lifting the characters in *Na dne* to human status, but unlike other critics, he did not see Luka as the only source of life in the play. He further admitted the importance of Luka in his desire to find a dream for everyone and to widen the narrow boundaries of the lower depths by concentrating on the problems of those entrapped there. For example, Andreevič claimed that Luka's conversation with Anna will always remain one of the brightest pages in Russian literature. In this regard, Andreevič compared Luka to Tolstoj's Platon Karataev in *Vojna i mir* and argued that *Na dne* revealed the beginnings of a Karataev-like element of reconciliation in Gor'kij's work. In spite of being at times fairly critical, Andreevič praised Gor'kij for his talent in putting into one picture so much human suffering. He contended that this achievement alone compensated for and even overshadowed the deficiencies in Gor'kij's plays.

In a similar review of *Na dne* in "Po povodu p'esy Gor'kogo *Na dne*.",[117] Evgenij Ljackij confirmed the main arguments raised by other critics in favour of the play. Like the majority of his contemporaries, he credited Gor'kij with introducing the

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[117] *Kritičeskoe posobie*, 226-234. This article was first published in *Vestnik Evropy*. 1903. No. 4. Also, an earlier article by the same author entitled "Maksim Gor'kij i ego rasskazy" which appeared in Vestnik Evropy, no. 11: 274-311, looked at Gor'kij both as writer and thinker. In it, Ljackij also examined the philosophy in Gor'kij's short stories, including "Mal'va" and "Konovalov". Finally, Ljackij observed that Gor'kij had a future in Russian literature.

Russian reader to a relatively unknown world of human suffering. Similarly, he observed the absence of a plot or a specific intrigue linking the main characters in *Na dne*. Nevertheless, Ljackij contended that the nature, "profession" and origin of each participant in the play constitute a plot with a lot of drama and interest. He maintained that while the characters of *Na dne* are categorized as "former people", they represent a mixed society of different personalities, who maintain certain individual characteristics, unaffected by their coexistence with others. Thus, there are good and bad personalities, honest and dishonest citizens, kind and wicked people, optimists and cynics who comprise members of the bourgeoisie, merchants and ordinary people. Ljackij praised Gor'kij for portraying the distinct nature of each character.

While the critic remarked that Gor'kij's characters reciprocate in fondness and love, he maintained that the playwright did not bring the romantic element to the fore in *Na dne*. Instead, he noted that Gor'kij used the absence of this sort of drama to focus attention on its main events. Seen from this point of view, Ljackij argued that *Na dne* is full of drama. Nevertheless, he claimed that if one were to look for something that would tie all the elements of the play together, then the introduction of Luka could serve such a purpose. He upheld the widely shared opinion that Luka was an important personality, whose arrival on stage introduced the elements of reconciliation and sympathy into the play. Ljackij argued that the importance of Luka is borne out both by the attention Gor'kij directs at him, as well as by his overall impact on the play.

Unlike Andreevič, who also stressed the social implications of the play, Ljackij restructured his observations primarily to the artistic aspects of the work. Thus, he not

only concentrated on the compositional elements of *Na dne*, but also discussed the interactions between various characters. With respect to the artistic merits of the work, Ljackij was unique among critics in stressing the significance of the play's linguistic composition. He concluded that the specific Gor'kian style of *Na dne*, coupled with the linguistic wealth and reality of the play made it one of Gor'kij's best works. Even more significantly, Ljackij treated the introduction of Luka into the play first and foremost as a structural element because, according to him, Luka served both as a unifying force and an alternative plot.

In contrast to Ljackij, T.S. Petrov examined Gor'kij's plays from a purely sociological context.[118] A priest by profession, Petrov's main concern was the effect of Gor'kij's work on morals, particularly on those of the young.[119] Determined to expose the challenge Gor'kij posed to the established moral code, Petrov reviewed Gor'kij's work against the background of the Nietzschean philosophy which he saw as pervasive in them. Beginning with a review of *Meščane*, Petrov focused on the dark sides of the play and pointed to the inability of the protagonists to cope with life. He observed the submission of Gor'kij's characters to a Nietzschean philosophy and, blaming this situation and the general conditions in Russia on a lack of will power and aristocratism ("ne xvataet togo, čto daet žizni istinnuju aristokratičnost', ... ne xvataet jasnogo i polnogo

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[118] Petrov, *Brat'ja pisateli*. 4th ed. (S. Petersburg, Voščinskij, 1904) 151 pages.

[119] It is significant to mention here that in an article entitled "Čto propoveduet Gor'kij?", Mixail Ierom also examined what he called "propoved' otricanija lži" and its significance on the spiritual evolution of Russian society. See: Mixail Ierom, *K vode živoj*. (St. Petersburg: 1904) 40-49.

razumenija vysšego ideala bytija i sil' dlja osuščestvlenija étogo ideala, provedenie ego v žizni", 85), observed that Nietzsche's "superman" personality was a dangerous aberration which must be attacked and stifled.

Shifting his focus to *Na dne* in "Svetlyj gost' (*Na dne* Gor'kogo)",[120] Petrov called the play an examination of conscience and an invitation to self-criticism for all who are familiar with it. He considered *Na dne* a true reflection of contemporary Russian life and expressed concern that the literate and sophisticated would ignore the shocking and engaging events in it. In a rare strain of literariness, Petrov compared the play to Plato's dialogues and also noted that, *Na dne*, like *Meščane* has no plot. He described the play as a trial with suffering and despair at its core, so the critic breathed a sigh of relief when Luka arrived on the scene.

Like many before him, Petrov argued that Luka brought new life into the "lower depths". Delighted at Luka's desire to rescue the inmates from total degeneration and return them to "normal" life, Petrov found in him a Christ-like figure, especially in his relationship with others. He noted, for example, that while Luka himself had experienced a lot of hardship, he was not bitter. Instead, Petrov observed that Luka understood the need to sympathise with others. In view of these qualities, Petrov expressed satisfaction with the personality of Luka and praised Gor'kij for finally introducing a "positive" character into his work. He noted Luka's distinctiveness from Gor'kij's previous gallery of tramps and "supermen", through whom Gor'kij had allegedly channeled his personal protest. For Petrov, Luka's genuine interest in the lives of the people around him was

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[120] Petrov, 1904: 120-151.

a true unifying force.

Petrov expressed his satisfaction with the introduction of such a protagonist and hoped that the delinquent Russian writer had finally seen the light. He claimed that despite Gor'kij's fascination with the tramp figure, through whose eyes he saw everything around him, the evolution from *Meščane* to *Na dne* indicated that he had matured. Petrov argued that the transition between the two plays represented an easing up on the writer's former stance, since he had become less judgemental and more understanding. He contended that by creating a "positive" character, who not only listened to and understood the unfortunate, but was also compassionate and willing to help, Gor'kij had taken a step further away from his original position. Petrov described this transition as follows:

> Ponjat' étu pravdu Gor'kij i v svoem xudožestvennom izobraženij žizni pošel dal'še, sdelal novyj šag. On po novomu podošel k žizni: ne s razdražennym ozlobleniem protestujuščego bosjaka, a s ser'eznym, vdumčivym okom zrelogo bytopisatelja. Kartina predstavilas' po-staromu grustnaja. Vse niščenski bedno duxom, meščanski ubogo, sero, bezsvetno. Javilis' "Meščane".
> "V Meščanax" Gor'kij vidit vsju gor'kuju pravdu bezsmenovščiny, no on uže ne sudit, ne kaznit ee. U nego žalki starij, žalki i deti. Odni ne našli pravdu, drugie ne znajut gde ee iskat'. Tut net vinovatyx, est' nesčastnye: Vam odinakogo žalko vsex."
> "-- Žalko étix bednyx "Meščan". Tak nel'zja ostavit ix žit'. Kak by pomoč' im? -- vot osnovnoe vpečatlenie, kotoroe ostavljajut posle sebja "Meščane" Gor'kogo."
> "V "Na dne" Gor'kij delaet ešče novyj tretij šag i daet jasnyj otvet na vopros "kak byt'?" "čto delat'?[121]

As is obvious in the preceding quote, Petrov emphasized the sociological aspects of Gor'kij's work by focusing on his attitude toward the participating personalities.

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[121] Petrov, 1904: 131-132.

Almost to the total exclusion of any literary considerations in both *Meščane* and *Na dne*, Petrov demonstrated his extreme concern for the extra-literary aspects of the two works. In doing so, he attacked what he perceived to be the negative effects of Gor'kij's plays and career in general.

Yet, in one respect, Petrov acknowledged that Luka was a victory both for Gor'kij's talent and all of Russian literature. Even in this rare acknowledgement, Petrov still made it clear that Gor'kij did not carry Luka through to a "logical conclusion". This, he attributed partly to the general inability of Russian literature to properly diagnose the agony of the Russian soul. More significantly, Petrov blamed Gor'kij for this weakness, saying: "Ponimaja nuždu mogučego i životvornogo slova i strasno želaja skazat' ego, Gor'kij ne znaet, kakoj imenno éto slovo, ne umeet ego vyrazit'. U nego net dlja étogo na palitre sootvetsvujuščej kraski."[122]

In summing up Petrov's impressions about Gor'kij, it is noteworthy to mention that he neither stressed the literary nature nor the overall contribution of the author to Russian culture. Yet, according to Petrov's own comments, the revival of such questions as "kak byt'?" and "čto delat'?" in Gor'kij's work underscores the meaning of the author's work and his importance as a continuer of the nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition. It should be stressed that this aspect of Gor'kij's work also played an important role in making him acceptable to the Bol'ševiks and their supporters, especially after 1917 when they needed authority figures to promote their political and cultural agenda.

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[122] Petrov, 1904: 143

It is probably in the sphere of ideological and religious concerns that the comments and reaction of Lev Tolstoj to *Na dne* become most appropriate. Tolstoj's reaction to *Na dne* is known to us through Gor'kij's own recollections.[123] Recounting the first reading of his manuscript to the elderly Tolstoj, Gor'kij reports that after he read portions of the work to him, it became clear that he did not like the play. Tolstoj questioned Gor'kij on several important issues that touched on the central elements of the play and expressed his opinion on Gor'kij's approach. In particular, Tolstoj singled out Gor'kij's treatment of the *bosjak* and female characters and went on to chastise the writer for embellishing his work.

It is important to note that Gor'kij wrote *Na dne* in the midst of a continuing debate with Tolstoj. Since their first meeting a few years earlier in 1900, Gor'kij had argued with Tolstoj on certain philosophical matters. *Na dne* and *Byvšie ljudi*, earlier, can be regarded as a direct polemic with some of Tolstoj's Christian philosophies. Speaking later about his main objectives in *Na dne*, Gor'kij stated that one of his aims was to put forward the question as to whether truth or sympathy was better. Gor'kij considered the question of a general philosophical nature and asked whether or not it was necessary to push sympathy to the point when it turns into a lie -- as in the case of Luka.

It can be argued that in writing *Na dne* Gor'kij synthesized the personal observations he had seen among the different levels of society. He regarded his characters, some based on people he knew personally, as an embodiment of different individuals, and considered this work (much as he would later *Žizn' Klima Samgina*) as

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[123] M. Gor'kij, *Sobranie sočinenij v tricati tomax.* (Moscow: GIXL, 1951) 14: 270-271.

a historical picture of Russian life.

Some commentators have pointed to the similarity of roles between Tolstoj's Akim in *Vlast' t'my* and Gor'kij's Luka both as moral judges of the people around them, and as propagators of Christian morality. However, from the point of view of their creators, they are completely opposed. While Tolstoj, for example, makes Akim a total advocate of his ideas, the same cannot be said of Luka, who is much less consistent with Gor'kij's personal position. It is against this background that Tolstoj expressed his dislike for Gor'kij's play. Not only did Tolstoj find that *Na dne* lacked the plot needed for a drama, he also regarded Gor'kij's representation of the *bosjak* and other characters as exaggerated, if not false.

It is interesting to note that Tolstoj's dislike for the play even increased after it was performed by MXAT. If initially the author of *Vlast' tmy* protested against exaggeration and tendentiousness in the manuscript of *Na dne*, he now extended his list of complaints against the play. Commenting on the play to Ju. Beljaev, theatre critic and reporter for "Novoe vremja", Tolstoj reiterated his opposition to Gor'kij's portrayal of the *bosjaki* as wicked. Tolstoj argued instead, that the picture Gor'kij presented was the exception and not the rule.

From the perspective of the two writers, the main point of disagreement clearly centred on Tolstoj's and Gor'kij's views of people's ability to change their lives without corresponding change in the social structure. While the elderly Tolstoj believed that salvation lay in the individual himself ("carstvo vnutri vas") and that the individual's ability to better himself was inherent, Gor'kij argued that self-perfection was dependent

on a change in the social structure. Subsequently, in reading through *Na dne*, Tolstoj was particularly concerned about Luka whom he considered dangerous. Tolstoj refused to believe in the goodness preached by Luka for he regarded his role as ambiguous. It is obvious that Tolstoj did not see *Na dne* only as a literary work of art: in a controversial way it touched the cornerstone of his own philosophy and thus met with his strong disapproval.

What is relevant to Gor'kij's image in all of this is that Tolstoj's objections did not carry enough weight within the literary community to change the overall impression Gor'kij had left on contemporary critics and the reading public. If anything at all was remembered about Tolstoj's reaction in relation to Gor'kij's place in and contribution to Russian literature, it was those remarks that impacted on the literary merits of Gor'kij's work, but not Tolstoj's ideological lamentations, which were of a personal nature. Moreover, Gor'kij's ability to rouse the interest (and even anger) of his better known compatriot by challenging some of the main currents in his latter-day works only helped to put the younger writer on a similar footing with one of the most respected personalities in Russia both inside and outside of the literary community. In fact, in the context of Soviet Russia, Gor'kij's attacks on the philosophical positions of Tolstoj, and later Dostoevskij could only benefit his image. Therefore, it is only appropriate in the circumstances to argue that Gor'kij not only positioned himself as a continuer of the classical Russian literary traditions, he also questioned certain aspects of it. Even more significantly, he set the stage to become the founder of the literature of the new Russia that was only beginning to emerge.

If reviews of *Na dne* were predominantly favourable, with few exceptions such as Tolstoj's and Petrov's attacks on the moral defects of the work or criticisms by Merežkovskij and Filosofov motivated by ideological differences, impressions left by Gor'kij's other dramatic works were less positive. Contemporary critics both at home and abroad had concentrated on *Na dne* not only because of the great interest it raised in contemporary issues, but also because of its literary qualities. A quick count of critical works devoted to Gor'kij's plays in S. Baluxatyj's bibliography, which covers the author's work up to 1934, shows that more than three quarters of them dealt either exclusively or partially with *Na dne* at the expense of the other works.

However, a number of critics, especially those critical of Gor'kij's talent and literary skills, spent some time reviewing works like *Meščane*, *Dačniki* and *Vragi*, which were admittedly of a lower quality than *Na dne* and thus vulnerable to criticism. This was especially so with Filosofov in 1906, who launched one of the most blatant and damaging attacks seen on Gor'kij's work. Commenting on Gor'kij's work in an article,[124] Filosofov claimed that *Dačniki*, which had just played in St. Petersburg, was not a work of art as it stood outside the perimeters of good art which he did not define. Filosofov described the play as non-literary and pointed out that Gor'kij's inadequate literary background, coupled with a naive understanding of theatre and a child-like imitation of

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124 D.V. Filosofov, *Slova i žizn'. Literaturnye spory novejšego vremeni. (1901-1908gg).* (St. Petersburg: 1909) 50-78. Initially published in *Novyj put'*, Filosofov's articles "O "lži" Gor'kogo" no. 6: 212-217 and "Zavtrašnee meščanstvo" no. 11: 321-332 deal with *Na dne* and *Dačniki*. For example, in the first, Filosofov discussed Gor'kij's moral views and, while he upheld Gor'kij's treatment of the "great lie" in general, he is critical of the way the author dealt with it in *Na dne*.

Čexov at his worst, deprived the play of any literary value.

Further to this, Filosofov rejected claims by other critics that Gor'kij introduced new techniques into Russian literature. He also disputed claims by Gor'kij's admirers that initial negative reviews of the play were motivated by fear among the bourgeoisie and that its strengths lay not in its literariness but in its social value. Filosofov did not accept *Dačniki* as an affront to bourgeois taste, but pointed out that the play was written for mass consumption. The critic suggested that *Dačniki* represented more the work of a publicist than that of a creative writer.

Having rejected any social value in the play, Filosofov pointed out that its ideas were negative and he joined with Petrov in calling for them to be opposed. Filosofov refused to accept any favourable explanations for the play's success, and maintained that *Dačniki* owed its apparent success to the Russian public's attraction to plays without action. He also called the language of the play an affront to the Russian language. While Filosofov had granted that in *Na dne*, Gor'kij made significant contributions to the Russian language, he claimed that *Dačniki* represented a degeneration of its author's language to the level of cheap journalese.

Notwithstanding his criticism of Gor'kij's dramatic works, Filosofov praised the writer's unwillingness to forget his past and the suffering associated with it. He considered Gor'kij, primarily, as a writer of protest and argued that his main strength lay in the way he depicted the anger of oppressed people. He maintained that it was this protest and negation which appealed to readers and brought out Gor'kij's true nature and talent as an artist. Filosofov asserted that the elements of protest and negation were so

important to Gor'kij that as soon as he shifted to affirmation, his talent eluded him. The critic also pointed out that as a creator of positive social types, Gor'kij did not go beyond the ideals of personal happiness and well-being. While he praised Gor'kij for predicting the appearance in Russian society of a fourth force that had almost lost its human side in the struggle for survival, he maintained that there was nothing significantly new in Gor'kij's work.

In his concluding remarks, Filosofov observed that *Na dne* marked the height of Gor'kij's success. He maintained that after it Gor'kij's work declined and became inundated with triviality and pretentious rhetoric. The critic pointed out that the deteriorating quality of Gor'kij's work was evidenced by some of his writings circulating in the company of some very poor works by others. As a result of all this, Filosofov argued that it was no surprise that *Dačniki* made a tragic impression on both the audiences and critics. He pointed out that the shortcomings of the play were so obvious that even its admirers, who saw in it a new turn in the fight against narrow-mindedness and philistinism, admitted to its technical weaknesses.

While Filosofov's article stresses all the possible weaknesses in Gor'kij's world view and literary talent, it is significant that he recognised the importance of the writer's role in Russian literature. He not only acknowledged that Gor'kij's strength and historical importance lay in his defence of the underdog, but also admitted that the writer brought his message across in his own specific way, even more significantly, and in a substantially new manner.

This last remark contradicts earlier assertions by Filosofov that Gor'kij added nothing significantly new to Russian literature and weakens his criticism of Gor'kij. Moreover, it demonstrates the difficulty Gor'kij's opponents had in justifying their position at a time when he was extremely popular. In another sense, this obvious contradiction of opinions not only signalled a fragmentation of critical sentiment about Gor'kij, but also exposed the almost relentless effort by critics like Filosofov to oppose Gor'kij at all cost. It should be recalled that even before this time, sensitivity to criticism of the bourgeois *intelligencija* in Gor'kij's short stories and first novel, in particular, had earned the writer the dislike of conservative critics. In fact, by the middle of the first decade of our century, critics of Gor'kij were able to exploit a downturn in his literary fortunes to reinforce their opposition to his work. This *de facto* crusade was partly led by Filosofov and culminated in his article, first published in the April edition of *Russkaja mysl'* under the title *Konec Gor'kogo*,[125] in which he pronounced the death of Gor'kij as a writer. This article produced an enormous reaction, and the spirited defence of Gor'kij among contemporary critics testified to the strong place he held in Russian literature.[126]

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[125] Filosofov, 1909: 50-78.
It is important to note here that Filosofov's assertions were preceded three years earlier by similar observations from Mixail Moskal, who attacked Gor'kij's views as justification for evil. Moskal asserted then that Gor'kij had practically exhausted his creative potential. He argued, therefore, contrary to most of his peers at the time, that nothing could significantly change the direction of Gor'kij's art. See: M. Moskal, *Opravdanie zla. Pafos M. Gor'kogo*. (Moscow: A.B. Vasil'ev, 1902).

[126] In response to Filosofov's article, A.G. Gornfel'd admitted in "Končilsja li Gor'kij" that Gor'kij's self-imposed exile in Italy at this time deprived the author of direct

Meanwhile, if Filosofov and his supporters disagreed with Gor'kij on ideological grounds, others, such as Aleksandr Valentinovič Amfiteatrov (dates n.a.), had a more mixed approach to the writer's work. In the main, Amfiteatrov, like many of his colleagues at the time, failed to separate his views of Gor'kij in terms of specific works and genres. For example, in an article devoted to a general review of Gor'kij's dramatic works,[127] Amfiteatrov began by registering his dislike for *Čelovek* (1904), a programmatic work which set out to describe Gor'kij's approach to life. He not only rated this work poorly, but went on to compare it to *Pesnja o sokole* (1895) and *Pesnja o Burevestnike* (1901), which had then become synonymous with Gor'kij.

Sidestepping the discussion on Gor'kij's dramatic works, Amfiteatrov praised Gor'kij's short stories and early novels and highlighted the author's leading role in Russian literature. Like many of his contemporaries, Amfiteatrov compared Gor'kij to

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impressions of Russia. This, he argued, coupled with Gor'kij's fast deteriorating health, had shifted his work towards journalese. However, Gornfel'd rejected Filosofov's claims that Gorkij's career had come to an end and defended Gor'kij against allegations of preferential treatment by critics. He also challenged Filosofov to give proof of so-called critical hysteria over Gor'kij by Russian critics. While Gornfel'd conceded that the public's reaction to Gor'kij's success and popularity may have been overstated by the "minor press", he argued that major publications reacted responsibly to the author. Instead, he blamed Gor'kij himself for the public's diminishing interest in his literary fortunes which he tied to "grexi nekul'turnosti, grexi nejasnogo soznanija" on the part of the author. See A.G. Gornfel'd, *Knigi i ljudi. Literaturnye besedy*. (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Žizn', 1908) Vol. I: 102-111. Similarly, Vengerov agreed with Gornfel'd that the drop in Gor'kij's popularity around this time was because the author no longer reflected Russian conditions, and as such, did not move people as before. See: S. Vengerov, "M. Gor'kij" in *Russkaja literatura XX veka 1890-1910*. (Moscow: Mir, 1914) 199-200.

[127] A.V. Amfiteatrov, *Kontury*. (St. Petersburg: 1906) 46-69.

Dostoevskij and pointed out that the Man-God theme in his work bore a strong resemblance with the ideas of Dostoevskij's Kirilov in *Besy*.

Having established a formidable reputation for Gor'kij by focusing on his non-dramatic works, Amfiteatrov got around to *Meščane* and *Na dne* only to remark that Gor'kij's image and popularity remained high in Italy although the two plays were poorly staged in Rome and Palermo. He added that positive reviews of both works by the Vatican press testified to Gor'kij's talent.

It can be inferred from the arguments above and the manner in which Amfiteatrov "circled his theme" that he was not overtly enthusiastic about Gor'kij's dramatic works. This is evidenced by the continuous references he makes to the writer's earlier prose. Yet, it is significant that the critic did not dismiss Gor'kij's overall creative contributions to Russian literature, even if they were not in the area of drama.

Amfiteatrov's approach is not entirely typical of the work of the critics under review. Nevertheless, it highlights the tremendous difficulties Gor'kij's contemporaries met with in dealing objectively with him. Having made a name for himself as a successful short-story writer, Gor'kij found it increasingly hard to rid himself of that title. All attempts at other genres seemed to attract comparatively little attention, from the critics in particular. Even more so, the situation worsened with the years as Gor'kij made relentless efforts to make his mark in other areas.

While the situation described above in the last two reviews does not completely deal with the difficulties involved with assessing Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature at the time, it makes it possible to see how critics and supporters of the writer

sometimes had to resort to rather "unorthodox" ways to make their points. What is clear is that by the turn of the century a majority of critics were unable to discuss Gor'kij's work in a direct manner. Not only did his detractors reach beyond specific texts to deny him any literary abilities, his supporters cited more favourable works to obscure his failures. Moreover, if the former tended to justify their position through generalizations, the latter treated poor works in Gor'kij's oeuvre as aberrations.

It is in light of the above that one finds S.A. Vengerov's contribution to the debate illuminating. Using the success of *Meščane* to demonstrate Gor'kij's popularity, Vengerov pointed out that *Meščane* was the first book in the history of the Russian book trade to sell tens of thousands of volumes. He noted that the play not only sold over 25,000 copies within the first fifteen days of its publication, but also attained the overall colossal number of 100,000 copies.

Vengerov further pointed out that just as in Russia where Gor'kij had received enormous attention for his literary work, he had also won critical acclaim all over Europe. In particular, he mentioned that Gor'kij was best received in Germany, where he was rated on the same level with Tolstoj, arguably Russia's leading writer at the time. Vengerov noted, for example, that *Na dne* ran daily in Berlin for one and a half years, totalling over 500 shows. In the same breath, he observed that the play had met with similar enthusiasm in Vienna and München and had generated so much attention for its author that a movement was formed to combat Gor'kij's influence -- especially among young Germans. The critic noted that similar reactions had led to the publication of *Fort mit Gorki*, a much vaunted book aimed at combatting the negative effects of Gor'kij's

work on good German literature.

Vengerov highlighted Gor'kij's success as a dramatist in the 1900s, but pointed out that *Deti solnca* and *Dačniki* were received with only mild interest when they were published in 1905 and 1906 respectively. He attributed this downturn to a decline in the demand for Gor'kij's work. Vengerov claimed that the change in Gor'kij's literary fortunes was tied to fashion and that Gor'kij's work had simply become less fashionable.[128]

Just as in the articles by Filosofov and Amfiteatrov, Vengerov's article failed to discuss in detail the literary features of Gor'kij's dramatic works. On the contrary, it drew conclusions from extra-literary considerations. Vengerov not only judged the success of Gor'kij's plays primarily by the way the market reacted to them, but also by the reaction of various governments and social groups.

The quantitative approach used by Vengerov makes it easier to measure how popular Gor'kij was in terms of sale circulation and performance. Yet, one finds it particularly surprising that a notable critic like him relied mainly on this to assess Gor'kij's popularity. While this approach is capable of providing a legitimate measure of a writer's popularity, Vengerov's heavy dependence on it further reveals the extent to which extra-literary matters affected the debate on the significance of Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature. This was equally demonstrated by the reaction of

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[128] Similar to Vengerov, Kogan attributed the down turn in Gor'kij's literary fortunes to a change in the social atmosphere then. See: P.S. Kogan, *Očerki po istorii russkoj literatury*. Vol. III. 1st ed. (Moscow: 1910).

society to the moral effects of Gor'kij's literary works.

As demonstrated in the second half of this chapter, which deals with critical reactions to Gor'kij's plays, there was a strong tendency among critics in Russia at the beginning of this century to apply extra-literary considerations to the determination of Gor'kij's place in and contribution to Russian literature. As such, it comes as no surprise, especially in relation to Gor'kij whose personal biography became a predominant issue in his art, following the examples of Garšin and Nadson already mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation. His literary fame having been preceded by his personal fame, assessments of Gor'kij's work were dominated by the tendency among contemporary critics to see the author in his work. This approach had become evident in the intensified attempts by contributors to the current debate to search for a parallel between Gor'kij the man and Gor'kij the artist. More importantly, it has, undoubtedly cast some doubts over the real success of Gor'kij's plays independent of other factors.

Yet, given what we know about theatrical reaction to Gor'kij's dramatic works from people who worked closely with him on performing them and from some of the accompanying critical opinions above which focused on their artistic merits, it is safe to conclude that, but for the isolated case of *Deti solnca*, which failed due to the prolonged general strike of 1905,[129] Gor'kij's plays met with wide acclaim. While in hindsight these plays no longer evoke the same feelings today, the timely nature of their message and the particular political climate in which they appeared made them an overwhelming

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129 *Ežegodnik Moskovskogo Xudožestvennogo teatra, 1948,* (Moscow: 1951) 2: 53.

success both at home and abroad at the time. Moreover, the erratic and high-handed approach adopted toward Gor'kij by the Czarist authorities made it inevitable that his plays would be discussed or interpreted with a linkage to contemporary Russian conditions and life. This helped to foster a strong link between the author and his audience. Gor'kij's plays not only brought a strong message to the people, they also ensured that he became the hero -- one of their own --, who expressed their frustrations. His subsequent involvement in the anti-Czarist movement and his arrest and detention which provoked worldwide condemnation of the regime were, undoubtedly a consequence of the impact his drama had on the Russian people, their government and people abroad.

Later, in the Soviet years, when Gor'kij became widely accepted as the dean of Soviet letters, various steps were taken to extend his influence to other fields in the arts. Such steps included a strong emphasis by researchers on the prominent role of his dramatic works as well as the propagation of his image as a dramatist by leading critics such as B. Mixajlovskij, E. Tager, S. Kastorskij, B. Bjalik, A. Ovčarenko, A. Volkov and E. Babajan, together with several other less known critics who devoted their entire careers to exploring Gor'kij's work. As well, under the broad umbrella of "Gor'kovedenie" and the related "Gor'kovskie čtenija", two important aspects of Soviet criticism devoted to studying the writer's works and their impact on contemporary literature, Soviet commentators sought to assert the significance of Gor'kij's plays in Russian literature. Through these and other institutionalized measures, Gor'kij was not only assured a place in the Russian literary canon as a dramatist, but perhaps, more importantly for his image, as a pioneer in twentieth century drama.

Conclusion.

While Gor'kij's role in the development of 20th century literature may be evaluated differently, it should not be ignored. Like his heroes, in whose character and actions he embodied his own aspirations and faith, he travelled Russia in search of the truth. He drew his material from his own impressions. With a strong belief in a brighter tomorrow, Gor'kij sought the path that would lead to change in existing social conditions. Like most other Russian writers in the Czarist period, Gor'kij challenged the status quo and for this reason, his biography, like those of his predecessors, included prison and exile.

Gor'kij's work covered a wide range of Russian social reality at the turn of the century. He dealt with problems that excited and engrossed the public and filled the leader columns of the day. These problems included the spread of industrialization, the proliferation of capitalism, the emergence of the radical political left, the changing standards of morals and the new preoccupation with the ways of the unconscious mind. While he raged against current conditions, he carried them with him, albeit in an altered form.

Gor'kij remained realistic and even harsh in his judgement of contemporary Russian life especially before 1906. In particular, Gor'kij refused to idealize the peasant, through whom he exposed the dark and grim side of popular life. Thus, while the writer

occurred. Not surprisingly, these are the elements which dominate the psyche of the major characters he depicted in his works. Even more importantly for Gor'kij, he did not allow the demonstrable stagnation and backwardness of the Russian people to deter him. Rather, he sought means to overcome them. Where Gor'kij had no direct answers to the inescapable tragedy of Russian life, he relied on his creative sensibilities to inspire people with a dream.

In the period between 1892 and 1906 Gor'kij published nearly 200 feuilletons, short stories, novels, and plays. The prolific creativity of the writer and the particular circumstances of his life, as well as the state of Russian literature at the time, resulted in a correspondingly high number of critical works being devoted to Gor'kij. At first the majority of critics not only portrayed Gor'kij as a talented and gifted writer who approached his work impartially and objectively, they also saw in his fiction an abundance of some important elements discernible in the works of Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov. So, this also made the young author attractive to contemporary Russian readers. As a result of these putatively shared traits, it was generally accepted at the time that Gor'kij was continuing the tradition of the Russian classics. Significantly, Gor'kij not only won praise for the deep psychological insights that his major protagonists afforded, including insights into contemporary society, but he also won praise for his excellent nature descriptions, especially in his short stories.

Also important in the way Gor'kij was regarded among his contemporaries was the consensus among critics about his originality. This was so in spite of attempts at rough parallels between Gor'kij and other writers e.g., Nietzsche. Whether it was M.

Gel'rot who, in an early work[130] on the relationship between Gor'kij and Nietzsche singled out Nietzschean themes in Gor'kij's work without trying to prove influence, or others such as N.K. Mixajlovskij, who spent some time exploring the personality of individuals similar to those portrayed by Nietzsche and Gor'kij, early Russian critics were unable to document any direct structural and thematic links between the two writers. On the contrary, all the notable critics, while speculating on a possible link, denied any direct influence and left the door open for Gor'kij's admirers, then and later, to uphold his originality.

Of particular significance for Gor'kij and the overwhelming acclaim which greeted him upon his appearance on the Russian literary scene were changes in the literary process which gave him the opportunity to deal with certain pertinent issues in Russian culture in a manner specific to the times. For example, a new interest among readers in the lives of writers and a predominantly sociological approach adopted by most critics made it possible for individual authorial biographies to play a significant role in the acceptance of writers. Of even more importance was the fact that, unlike the preceding literary period, which was heavily dominated by realism, changes in the literary atmosphere allowed Gor'kij and his contemporaries a wider scope both in their subject matter and approach.

Gor'kij, who had collaborated with various newspapers and journals in the early stages of his career, focused on topical issues of national as well as international interest. This, coupled with the accompanying democratization of the literary process which

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[130] M. Gel'rot, "Nietzsche i Gor'kij: Elementy niščeantsva v tvorčestve Gor'kogo" in *Russkoe bogatstvo*. 1903. 5: 25-68.

resulted in an increase in readership guaranteed Gor'kij a wider audience than that of his predecessors who dealt with similar issues in their works. Additionally, it also provoked a furore over the significance of the writer's contribution to Russian life more generally. This and other factors account for the almost unprecedented attention which was paid to Gor'kij during the first decade of his literary career.

Also of special significance to Gor'kij and his future in Russian literature is the role of his plays, especially those written before 1905. The importance of Gor'kij's early dramatic works in shaping his overall image both as a playwright and eventual innovator on the Soviet dramatic scene is underscored by the fact that of the three periods in his literary career when he turned his attention to drama (1901-1906, 1910-1917, and the 1930s), the first remains the most memorable both for the average reader and theatre goer as well as for students of Gor'kij. The period between 1901 and 1906, which saw the publication and production of his most successful plays coincided with a new form of theatre in the West in which contemporary issues provided the main thematic drive. National and foreign reaction to *Meščane* and *Na dne* in particular turned Gor'kij into a writer of international significance. At the same time, they helped to lay the foundations of a realist method that would later be emulated throughout the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the Soviet era.

All in all, there are a number of identifiable trends in Gor'kij criticism during the first decade and a half of his literary career. Material available to us from this period leaves little doubt about the success of Gor'kij's work and his personal fame. Indeed, it can be said with a great deal of certainty that initial reaction to the writer and his work

came to dictate, to a large extent, the way in which Gor'kij was viewed in later years.

While the majority of the author's contemporaries regarded his work as a true embodiment of the mood of the period, and praised him for this, a small but vocal minority, who insisted on the self-referentiality of literature, downplayed Gor'kij's literary talent. Instead, they preferred to see him as a cultural and historical icon who offered an accurate account of events of his day in his work.

Thematically, the discussion on Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature can be categorized into the areas of literary-aesthetics, biography, and the historical, as well as the political and ideological. First, while those critics opposed to the writer's vision of the way Russia ought to develop (Filosofov, Merežkovskij, Gippius, Minskij, Men'šikov and Petrov) were careful not to deny him entirely literary merit, they constantly portrayed Gor'kij as a topical writer, who would have only limited importance. This position is hardly supported by the material available to us from that period, evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive reaction to Gor'kij's work. On the contrary, it is motivated by and large by their firm opposition to Gor'kij's perceived image in certain circles in the literary community at the time as a socially engaged writer. However, it must be mentioned, in fairness to these critics, that towards 1906, when the writer openly threw his lot behind the anti-czarist forces and modelled some of his works, including *Mat'* and *Vragi* on the Marxist vision of the future Russia, he lost much of his earlier broad-based appeal.

Contrary to this group, the majority of Gor'kij's contemporaries received him favourably. It bears repeating that while some other "non-literary" interests were

instrumental in their assessment of the author's work, for example with Posse and Andreevič, who were closely allied with Gor'kij, there is a case to be made that contemporary impressions on Gor'kij lean heavily towards the positive.

The question arises whether it was possible for Gor'kij's contemoporaries to exclude so-called extra-literary influences from their assessments of the author and his work; or even if these assessments made any significant difference to the image of the author, especially in the eyes of the Russian public. As we have seen in the body of the thesis itself, the nature of Russian literary criticism, which was dominated by a socio-cultural slant, not only permitted this approach, also, changes in the literary process at the turn of the century made the inclusion of these factors all the more important in their assessment of Gor'kij's place in Russian literary and cultural life.

Abroad, where Gor'kij's popularity mirrored that which he enjoyed back in Russia, the writer's attention was courted by often differing and conflicting groups. For example, one of the consequences of the lively political, economic and intellectual polemics of that period in Germany was the attempt the different power groups made to strengthen their positions by importing compatible ideas from abroad. As a result, the active political and cultural life of the turn of the century proved to be fertile soil for the reception and diffusion of Gor'kij's works. The newness of the subject, the strong primitive language of his heroes and heroines and the sharp social criticism expressed in his stories and dramas afforded the Russian writer outstanding success with German literary critics.

Just as in Russia, representatives of almost all trends in German literary criticism considered Gor'kij a spiritual ally and comrade-in-arms and contributed both to the spread

of and propaganda for his oeuvre.[131] For example, if by 1899 publications of the writer's work appeared exclusively in leading German magazines and newspapers, already in 1900, there were echoes in less known papers. Up to 1900, there were well over 100 editions of Gor'kij's work in German translation, -- with some of the best publishers participating in their dissemination. In addition to the over 500 consecutive times *Na dne* was staged in Berlin alone, the performances of this play in metropolitan and provincial Germany overall made it the most performed play up to that point in the country. It is in light of cases like this that one finds a certain interrelationship between the reception of Gor'kij inside and outside of Russia at the time. The period immediately following 1906 saw a cooling off in Gor'kij's popularity and reputation as a talented writer except for the radicals who rated his politically motivated works (*Mat'* and *Vragi*) highly. For example, while it had become clear to critics in the West by 1905 that Gor'kij was no great artist in the traditional sense of the word, towards 1906 certain voices in the Russian literary criticism had already pointed out what are today considered to be the major weaknesses of Gor'kij's oeuvre (tendentiousness, verbosity, didactism and exaggeration). While most commentators at this time found the writer's work revealing of the Russian soul, there began to be general agreement that he ranked lower than Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov, whom he had succeeded as the main representative of Russian literature.

Yet, as attested to by the remarks of Ossip Lourié, the significance of Gor'kij's oeuvre was not lost on the average critic. In a ten-page excerpt from *La psychologie des romanciers russes du XIX siècle*, in which he reviewed Gor'kij's early work, Lourié

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131 H.H. Bielfedt, ed. *Maxim Gorki in Deutschland. Bibliographie 1899 bis 1965*. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968) 8.

argued that Gor'kij's stories were a natural outcome of nineteenth-century Russian social literature in the tradition of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Turgenev's *Hunter's Sketches* and Dostoevskij's *Notes from the House of the Dead.*[132] Notwithstanding such acknowledgements and the failure of critical voices to affect the largely positive opinions that the public held about the writer then, it is accurate to say that Gor'kij's image as the leading belles-lettrist in Russia, especially after *Ispoved'* (1908) and *Detstvo* (1913) was less favourable among contemporary critics.

The failure of critical comments to make any significant impact on the way the majority of Gor'kij's contemporaries received him may have resulted from the unwillingness of most critics to abandon their individual ideological convictions. Strict allegiance among critics to certain positions also resulted in a situation in which most critics were unable to separate their dislike for Gor'kij's philosophical and ideological stance on contemporary issues from a genuine aesthetic criticism of the writer's work.

In addition, as can be observed from the reviews published by the critics referred to in this dissertation, there was a strong tendency among turn-of-the-century critics to repeat the generally positive and popular opinions about Gor'kij and his work expressed by highly regarded literary personalities. This, supported by an equally strong feeling in the literary community that Gor'kij filled a perceived void in Russian literature after Tolstoj and Čexov, left a lasting favourable impression of the author in the minds of readers and critics alike.

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132 Ossip Lourié, "Maksim Gorki" *Open Court*, 19, No. 592. (September), (Chicago: 1905) 513-522.

It is important to mention, however, that while ideological quarrels, including those described above, have only added to the difficulty in properly assessing Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature, remarks belonging to some of these critics, especially those opposed to Gor'kij, survived long enough to emerge later as the dividing point between Soviet and émigrés perceptions of the writer -- especially after 1917; this, even after such hostile voices had failed to turn the balance against Gor'kij among his contemporaries earlier on in his career. In particular, while in exile, Bunin, Merežkovskij and Gippius, who had opposed Gor'kij's aesthetics earlier, were instrumental in spreading the view that Gor'kij was a weak writer, whose contribution to Russian culture was essentially limited to his having been a historical phenomenon.

It is clear that, over time, Gor'kij has rated lower than Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov. However, there is no denying that he complemented their efforts in portraying nineteenth-century Russian society and that his prominence in the 1890s and 1900s rivalled anything they had achieved. Gor'kij started where the great writers of Russian literature left off. In contrast to the pathetic and ineffectual literary characters of the preceding epoch, he created fearless, uncompromising protagonists, who took it upon themselves to lead their countrymen in the fight for a brighter future. Unlike his predecessors, Gor'kij maintained a strong faith in man, believing that a person could overcome all obstacles.

Admittedly, the revolutionary fervour in much of Gor'kij's early writing is rather low. Yet, most of his works contain an active attitude to life which bears the best of the Russian past and the experiences of contemporary Russia. Gor'kij combined a powerful

social message in his writing with an inherently genuine ability to convey not only pain and suffering, but also the aspirations of his characters as well. He generally felt love and compassion for his characters. This could explain the writer's glorification of the human collective and social progress in what turned out to be, albeit briefly, a period of God-building for which he was later reproached both by political leaders and literary critics in the Soviet era.

Born from the ashes of the great Russian classical traditions, Gor'kij's ideas, as expressed in his creative writing, were fanned partly by the constant philosophical debates in which he engaged with his predecessors, particularly, Dostoevskij and Tolstoj. While Gor'kij greatly admired the talent and scope of Dostoevskij, Tolstoj and Čexov, he did not always agree with their ideas. In particular, he opposed their pacifist approach to life and quarrelled with a number of issues which were fundamental to their work. As a result, Gor'kij polemicised with them both in his fiction and elsewhere.

Thus, it can be argued that while Gor'kij continued the centuries old Russian tradition in defence of the "little man", his approach to the long sought after solution differed significantly from that of his predecessors both in tone and content. For example, Gor'kij reviled Dostoevskij's continuous airing of the beastly side of Man without any prescriptions for a solution. Similarly, he rejected Tolstoj's Christian approach and considered Čexov's protagonists too weak.

In place of what the younger writer considered to be too conformist and ineffectual for contemporary Russian society, Gor'kij offered the daring, aggressive and yet sympathetic character. Through a dual approach, Gor'kij sought to achieve in a way

that others before him had failed to do; explain to his readers the intricacies and complexities of contemporary reality. Of more significance, Gor'kij went on to suggest definite solutions out of the impasse. This took the form of both reality and fantasy -- the aim being that where the first failed, the second could provide a viable alternative. More than anything else, this accounts for Gor'kij's pervasive mixture of both a realistic and romantic approach in his early work.

While it is true that the romantic influences of Byron and especially Nietzsche, whose ideas were popular across Europe at the end of the century may have served to buttress Gor'kij's image, his heroes arise out of a native Russian tradition of social protest and striving for a better life.[133] However, Gor'kij's heroes differ in one major respect -- they depart from the typical Russian hero in that they are men of action. Still, other factors contributed to Gor'kij's uniqueness. Contemporary conditions and events provided Gor'kij with an almost inexhaustible amount of material upon which he could draw for both his prose and drama, and they sharpened the conscience of traditional Russian readers. More importantly, these conditions modelled an entirely new reader who regarded Gor'kij's work, above all, as a chronicle of the tribulations of his own life.

Transformed from an individual crusader against harsh and unjust conditions in the pre-revolutionary years to being a national institution in the Soviet era, Gor'kij became the leader of a literary movement whose aim it was to lead people all over the world into a promising future. Prominent Soviet critics including B. Bjalik, V. Yermilov,

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[133] P. Krasin, "Nravstvennye načala (principy novejšej russkoj xudožestvennoj literatury)" in *Vera i razum*. no. 5: 622-40; no. 6: 786-810; no. 7: 81-96; no. 8:225-30.

K. Muratova, Ju. Juzovskij, N. Belkina, B. Mixajlovskij, E. Tager, S. Kastorskij, A. Ovčarenko, A. Volkov and E. Babajan, B. Bursov, A Mjasnikov and V. Borov'ev studied Gor'kij's work from the perspective of a new literary-artistic method, namely Socialist Realism. A considerable amount of energy was devoted to researching the writer's creative abilities, style, genres as well as the specificities of his language. Special emphasis was placed on Gor'kij's dramatic works, while partial attention was given to his views on literature, especially those dealing with esthetics. Ultimately, the focus of all these ventures was to describe, and secure Gor'kij's place and importance in Russian literature and culture, as well as in the national literatures of the Soviet Union, and in world literature.

None of the above, including other gigantic steps taken by the Soviet regime in order to enhance Gor'kij's image, especially in the 1930s, have succeeded in laying to rest questions about the writer's true contribution to Russian cultural and literary life. Just as at the beginning of Gor'kij's career when leading contemporary critics, while praising him, were suspicious of his talent, attempts to arrive today at a reasonable resolution of the question of the writer's place in Russian literature have become even more complicated (especially due to the nature of his participation in events in Russia after 1917) as Soviet views on the man and the writer reflect the atmosphere of selectivity and politically coloured interpretations usually associated with the Soviet era and are, therefore, frequently dismissed.

The long-standing difficulty then and now among critics and other leading literary figures to determine Gor'kij's proper place in Russian culture can be seen in the attitudes

toward him of two of his earliest associates. While it is known that both Čexov and Korolenko resigned from the Academy of Sciences following the renunciation by Czarist decree of Gor'kij's appointment to that body in 1902, Knjazev has shown that neither man thought Gor'kij was qualified enough for the honour.[134] In fact, of the two only Korolenko had Gor'kij on his list, and even then he was the seventh and last for consideration. Similarly, Serge Persky observed in his introduction to a French translation of Gor'kij's *Step'* that on the basis of talent alone Gor'kij could not be put side by side with the great names of Russian literature. He contended that Gor'kij was more a social activist than a writer and that this explained why the language of his protagonists goes beyond their cultural and educational levels.

Undoubtedly, though, it was Bunin, an early admirer and close friend of Gor'kij for many years who, in his memoirs, put forward the dilemma of the writer's image in the bluntest of terms. Reviewing his relationship with Gor'kij and several other important names in Russian literature in the 1920s, the author of *Listopad* and *Derevnja* stressed the illusory nature of his former friend's fame and cast further doubt on the nature of Gor'kij's talent. While Bunin's remarks, which questioned the source of Gor'kij's popularity, are fraught with emotion and personal resentment against Gor'kij, they are even today relevant to the study of the latter's place in Russian literature. Of still greater significance is their role in underscoring the difficulties with which one is faced when dealing with the question of Gor'kij's image. The message of Bunin's attack on Gor'kij is best described by A. Ninov in a review of the relationship between the two writers.

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[134] Knjazev, "Maksim Gor'kij i carskoe pravitel'stvo" *Vestnik Akademija Nauk. SSSR.* no. 2. 1932.

Commenting on Bunin's remarks in Paris about Gor'kij, Ninov made the following observation:

> Vse, čto bylo skazano dal'še, otnosilos' ne stol'ko k žanru literaturnyx memuarov, skol'ko k razrjadu literaturnogo paskvilja, -- nastol'ko grubo, tendenciozno, antixudožestvenno (daže v pamfletnom smysle) podavalis' memuaristom epizody ego pervyx vstreč s Gor'kim, otnošenie k Gor'komu Čexova i mnogoe, mnogoe drugoe.[135]

Bunin's "memoirs" were so sensational in content that they evoked utter surprise even in the Parisian émigré press of the time. For example, I.V. Talin, who was present at the reading of Bunin's declamatory memoirs, called them "Tetradki zlobnoj zapisi zlobnyx čuvstv i zlobnyx myslej o bol'šix, srednix i malyx dejatelej russkix literatury..."[136]

Indeed, I.V. Talin and others have shown that at the time of these remarks Bunin not only wrote and lived in the past, but that his familiar nostalgia for the past took the form of an ailment. These critics have pointed out that Bunin not only singled out Gor'kij for severe criticism, but that his attitude to other writers like Veresaev, Serafimovič, Brjusov, Blok, Belyj and Andreevič, which had hitherto varied, appeared now to be the same. The feeling towards all of the above was one of distance and enmity. While Bunin admitted to talent playing a considerable role in the fame of his former friend and literary

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[135] Ninov, 1984: 537-8.

[136] I.V. Talin, *Literator I.A. Bunin ob ostal'nyx*. Vols 2-3. (Paris: Čisla, 1930) 305-307.

ally, he, like many others, was unable to determine the nature of Gor'kij's talent. For obvious reasons, Bunin failed to understand why the author of "Song of the Falcon" and other similar works could capture the attention of so many. Instead, he attributed Gor'kij's fame to an immature, low-brow readership. If contemporaries of Gor'kij found him too elusive to describe, the situation is even more difficult in hindsight.

In spite of these difficulties, it must be emphasized that the period between 1900 and 1906 saw Gor'kij at the peak of his popularity both at home and abroad. In Russia, during this period, yearly publications on his work alone averaged 300 articles and books. It is significant that this phenomenal attention to Gor'kij coincided not only with the years after which he had already made his mark as a short story writer, but also occurred at a time when he had finished his first successful novel and engaged in writing and producing a series of exceptionally successful plays which brought him even closer to his readers and audiences everywhere.

A man of tremendous energy and perseverance, Gor'kij's overall approach to Russian literature was dictated by a genuine personal concern for the fate of his country and the desire to do something to help the individual. At the same time, the writer made a conscious effort to compromise with history. He realized that the future of the country was taking a certain direction, and while he had serious doubts about the means to achieve certain ends, he recognized the futility of opposing a whole trend. While it is appropriate to see some elements of human vanity in the direction taken by Gor'kij's work (he tried to place himself in the pantheon of Russian literature along with great writers like Tolstoj and Dostoevskij by exploring all the main genres of the time,

especially the novel), there is little reason to doubt his genuineness in the immense sacrifices he made to improve the lot of individual writers and Russian cultural life in general. At the same time, however, one can argue that Gor'kij was neither blind nor naive in the various positions he took in his career, for one can see calculated efforts on his part to position himself for the future. Yet, it was this latter attempt to position himself for the future -- as an innovator -- that caused Gor'kij the most anguish especially over his reception within the literary community.

Nevertheless, Gor'kij's contribution to Russian literature in particular, especially at the earlier stages of his career cannot be entirely forgotten. It must be remembered that Dostoevskij received world-wide acclaim only posthumously, and it took Tolstoj another fifteen years after *Vojna i mir* before he achieved similar acclaim. In the case of Gor'kij, national and international recognition came immediately and almost simultaneously. In a little over a decade, Gor'kij had moved from a short story writer in provincial newspapers to a writer of world renown in all the major literary genres of the time. Not only did his works appear in scores of editions in Russia itself, by 1901 several of his short stories were translated into various Western European languages and had even reached the United States.

It is significant to point out in this regard that *Mat'* appeared in English two years before it was published in Russian in Berlin. Both *Foma Gordeev* and *Troe* appeared in English only two years after they were published in Russian. Similarly, *Foma Gordeev* was translated into French, German, Hungarian, Serbian and Croatian in 1901, and in the same year, *Byvšie ljudi*, *Konovalov*, *Mal'va* and *Suprugi Orlovy* also appeared in

translation. Editions of Gor'kij's work appeared regularly throughout Europe and the United States. In fact, by the start of World War I, most Europeans could read Gor'kij's work in their own language. In Germany, for example, the first compendium edition of Gor'kij's work, which was made up of selected stories appeared already between 1901 and 1903. Between 1901 and 1906, similar publications came out in Czech, Polish and French.

Gor'kij's popularity during the period under consideration can be attributed to the fact that he was very successful in fulfilling the needs of the time. This fact was best summed up in his memoirs by Skitalec (Stepan Gavrilovič Petrov, 1868-1941), a contemporary and close associate of Gor'kij with whom he collaborated on the editorial board of *Znanie*. In it, Skitalec not only spoke about Gor'kij's literary prowess and the tremendous success of the writer's dramatic works in particular, but also of the ability of Gor'kij to respond to the needs of all sectors of the Russian population. He wrote:

> ...vsja čitatel'skaja Rossija, žaždavšaja obnovlenija i predčuvstvovanija blizost'ju revolucii, dumala, čto u Gor'kogo v karmane ležit put' v obetovannuju stranu, tekujuščem mlekom i medom, k zavednomu ostrovu svobody, so vsemi ugodjami i zemljami, so vsemi blagopolučijami i vozdušno-xrustal'nymi zamkami. Vse obeščalo konec togdašnim nevzgodam: vesennee nebo, vesennee more, teplom vejuščij južnyj veter i vesna v serdce.[137]

As a result of Gorkij's ability to meet the demands of contemporary society, his canonization had to do not only with aesthetic matters, but also with his acceptance on the different agendas of different groups both in Russia and abroad. Among his fellow

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[137] S. Skitalec. *Povesti i rasskazy. Vospominanija.* (Moscow: 1960) 353.

writers, especially the younger ones, Gor'kij became so popular and revered that many imitated his every move. Both Telešov and Bunin have noted in their memoirs that Gor'kij's "popular" style was imitated by Andreev, Skitalec and other "Maksimovites" as they donned peasant blouses, high boots and tight-waisted peasant coats.

Paradoxically, it is correct to say that while, on the one hand, the discussions about Gor'kij before his exile from Russia in 1906 already highlighted the elements that would serve as the basis for his canonization, the way in which he was canonized in the Soviet Union along with a tendency to see him through Soviet eyes have overshadowed the early perceptions of the writer. In other words, Soviet perceptions of Gor'kij's place in and contribution to Russian literature and culture not only acted as a screen and, in many ways diminished the recognition of Gor'kij's achievements, especially in the early years of his career, they have even prevented to this day a proper appraisal of his rightful place in Russian and world literature.

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Critic-contributors

1. **Annenskij, Innokentij Fedorovič**. (1856-1909).

Russian impressionist poet of the early twentieth century. Annenskij was professor of Greek literature at the Czar's Lycee at Carskoe Selo and a leading classical scholar. His main themes included pessimism, isolationism and dreams of "other-worldly" beauty. His favourite theme is the weariness and futility of life, which can be overcome only through love or through art. Annenskij's works included *Tixie vesni* (1904) and *Kiparisovyj larec* (1910). He attempted to introduce French impressionism, especially the methods of Verlaine and Mallarmé into Russian literature. Annenskij also wrote modernist tragedies on classical themes (*Famira Kifared*, 1913). He translated Euripides in its entirety from Greek into Russian. In two books called *Knigi otraženija*, Annenskij displayed the tendencies of a subjectivist impressionist critic. Annenskij's lack of mysticism and clarity of expression influenced the younger generation. Indeed, he was the teacher of both Gumilev and Axmatova.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 2: 462 and William E. Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian literature*. 1956: 8).

2. **Amfiteatrov, Aleksandr Valentinovič**. (1862-1923).

Described as a bourgeois journalist and writer, Amfiteatrov contributed to the liberal journal *Russkie vedomosti*, *Novoe vremja* and other journals and newspapers of

the time. In 1902, he was exiled to Minusinsk for satirizing the Romanov family in a work called *Gospoda Obmanovy*. He emigrated in 1905 to Paris where, for sometime, he published *Krasnoe znamja* -- a journal with no particular party or political associations. Amfiteatrov returned to Russia at the start of W.W. II. and in 1916 he became one of the founders of the "černosotennaja" newspaper *Russkaja volja*. In 1917, Amfiteatrov collaborated with a series of publications and opposed Lenin and the Bol'ševiks. After the October Revolution, Amfiteatrov settled abroad where he took part in anti-Bol'ševik campaigns. His literary works include *Vosmedesjatniki* (1907-8) and *Desjatidesjatniki* (1910), which dealt with the life and activities of the late 19th century intelligentsia.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 2: 462).

3. **Batjuškov, Fedor Dmitrievič**. (1857-1920).

Russian literary historian and critic. He completed St. Petersburg University in 1880, where he taught from 1885-98. Batjuškov also taught high women's courses in philology. Between 1902 and 1906, he edited the liberal newspaper *Mir božij*. In two volumes of *Kritičeskie očerki i zametki* (1900-1902) and *V.G. Korolenko*, as man and writer (published posthumously in 1922), Batjuškov leaned toward liberal bourgeois literary criticism.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 4: 317)

4. **Bogdanovič, Angel Ivanovič. (1860-1907).**

Russian liberal bourgeois critic and publicist. In his youth Bogdanovič took part in the illegal populist circles, for which he was arrested and exiled. In 1893, he organised an anti-socialist populist group (Narodnoe pravo) in St. Petersburg. Bogdanovič worked for *Russkoe bogatstvo* and in 1894, he also worked for the liberal-bourgeois newspaper *Mir božij*, in which he had the literary column *Kritičeskie zametki*. The articles he wrote in this column were later collected and published posthumously in 1908 under the title *Gody pereloma 1895-1906*. In the second half of the nineties, Bogdanovič severed his ties with the Populist, taking the side of the Legal Marxists. He wrote reviews on the works of the major writers of his time, including Čexov, Korolenko, Veresaev, Kuprin and Gor'kij. The main trends in his critical works included opposition to Populism, Tolstojism and mysticism from a positivist position. Later, Bogdanovič worked at *Sovremennij mir*, which became the organ of the Legal Marxists and Men'ševiks.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 5: 347).

5. **Lunačarskij, Anatolij Vasil'evič**. (1875-1933).

Soviet statesman and social activist, prominent in promoting a socialist culture. At 17, Lunačarskij joined a Social-Democratic organization and became a Bolševik after the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democrats. He left for Geneva in 1904, where he took part in editing the Bolševik papers *Vpered* and later *Proletarij*. He worked closely with Lenin. In November 1905, Lunačarskij returned to St.

Petersburg, where he became an agitator. During this time, he also worked as one of the editors of *Novaja Žizn'*. Arrested and released on bail, Lunačarskij escaped abroad. In the years immediately after the failure of the 1905 Revolution, Lunačarskij became a revisionist and challenged the philosophical and historical foundations of Marxism. Together with A.A. Bogdanov and others, Lunačarskij organized the group *Vpered*, which opposed Lenin and objected to revolutionary warfare. Lunačarskij and other "god-builders" were severely criticised for their anti-Marxist stance in Lenin's "Materialism and Empiriocriticism". In 1911, Lunačarskij severed relations with the "god-builders" and formed the group called *Proletarskaja literatura*. He was accepted into the Bolševik party in 1917 and for the next twelve years following the October Revolution, he became the Minister of Education. In 1929, he became President of the Central Legislative Committee of the USSR (CIK SSSR). He became an academic in 1930. In 1933, Lunačarskij was appointed Ambassador-plenipotentiary to Spain.

Lunačarskij was a rather versatile type. A good public speaker, a publicist and a specialist in art, he was also knowledgeable in the history of Russian and Western literature. In addition, Lunačarskij was a literary critic and the author of dramatic works (*Oliver Cromwell*, 1920; *Foma Kompanela* 1922). As Soviet Minister of Education, Lunačarskij contributed immensely to the reorganization of Soviet school curricula, promoted the growth of art, especially the theatre. He was also active in the preservation of national monuments and supporting museums.

As a literary critic, Lunačarskij cannot be tied down to any specific dogma since he leaned toward different groups at various times. For example, while Soviet

critics criticize him for being soft on the Formalists and the supporters of "art for art sake", they note that by 1904, Lunačarskij was under the sway of Positivism as demonstrated in his *Fundamentals of Positivist Aesthetics*. At the same time, Soviet critics cite Lunačarskij's reviews on the classical literary tradition as well as on contemporary and modern literature for their deep and clear understanding of the principles of Marxism and as examples of realism. Lunačarskij's articles and reviews include works on Puškin, Gogol', Nekrasov, Černyševkij, Gor'kij and Majakovskij, among others. He also wrote articles on theatre and related subjects.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 25: 473).

6. **Merežkovskij, Dmitrij Sergeevič**. (1865-1941).

Described as a reactionary writer by Soviet critics, Merežkovskij was a representative of the Decadent movement. In the 1880s, he wrote poetry pervaded by mysticism and pessimism (*Stixotvorenija*). Merežkovskij also wrote historical novels including *Xristos i Antixrist* (1895-1904), the trilogy *Pavel I*, 1908); *Aleksandr I*, 1911-1912) and *14 Dekabrja* (1918). Merežkovskij emigrated abroad after the October Revolution, where he became a vehement critic of the Soviet regime. He was criticised by Lenin, Plexanov and Gor'kij respectively for his reactionary and anti-Bolševik stance. In his assessment of Russian literature, he rated both Čexov and Gor'kij rather low. Together with his wife Zinaida Gippius and their close friend and political and philosophical ally, Dmitrij Filosofov, they opposed the sociological approach in literature. (*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 27: 168).

7. **Minskij, Nikolaj** (pseudonym of Nikolaj Maksimovič Vilenkin 1855-1937).

A Russian poet, who published his first collection of verses in 1887, Minskij started his literary career as a Populist sympathizer. He later turned to the Decadent movement, where he propagated the ideas of Nietzsche and bourgeois individualism in art: *Pri svete sovesti*, 1890; *Religija buduščego*, 1905. One of the founders of a conservative religious-philosophical organization and an important name in the newspapers, Minskij was invited by the Bol'ševiks as a nominal editor of *Novaja žizn'*. He was editor when Lenin published his article "Party Organization and Party Literature". This did not stop Minskij from criticizing the Bol'ševiks, which led to a break with them in 1905. After 1917, Minskij left Russia.

Minskij's role as a theorist was not in accord with his revolutionary biography. In "An Ancient Controversy", he denounced positivism and utilitarianism and advocated a mystique of pure beauty. He was a precursor of the Symbolists. His book *In the Light of Conscience* was the first programmatic statement of Russian decadence. He developed a meonic theory of poetry, in which he asserted that poetry should strive for the ideal, impossible, and non-existent.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 27: 552; Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature*, New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1991, 412-13).

8. **Mixajlovskij, Nikolaj Konstantinovič**. (1842-1904).

Russian sociologist, publicist, literary critic, leading proponent of the Populist movement and opponent of Marxism, Mixajlovskij started his literary career in 1860.

In the 1870s, he was very close to the Populists and sympathized with the peasants, while opposing serfdom. He took part in underground democratic literary movements. As editor of *Otečestvennie zapiski* and *Russkoe bogatstvo*, Mixajlovskij was very critical of the Marxists. A supporter of the idealist theory between the "Hero" and the "crowd", Mixajlovskij played down the antagonism between classes and typified the intelligentsia as a "classless" force designated to save the peasants from social misery. However, Soviet critics blame him and other like-minded supporters of the peasant movement for stifling political awareness among them and preventing the underdogs from organizing a political party by advocating the theory of the "hero" and the "crowd". In fact, Mixajlovskij's brand of Populist Socialism is the subject of criticism in Lenin's *Čto takoe "druzja naroda" i kak oni vojujut protiv social-demokratov?* (1894) and other works. Similarly, the Bol'ševiks also criticized Mixajlovskij's *Russkoe bogatstvo*.

Philosophically, Mixajlovskij endorsed Positivism and Kantianism. He was particularly active as a literary critic in the 1880s and 1890s. Mixajlovskij's first work dedicated to Gončarov's *Obryv* was published in *Rassvet* in 1860. He went on to write numerous critical reviews on various leading Russian and international writers including Juri Lermontov, Nikolaj Nekrasov, Ivan Turgenev, Lev Tolstoj, Fedor Dostoevskij, Mixail Saltykov-Ščedrin, Gleb Uspenskij, Anton Čexov, Maksim Gor'kij, Emile Zola, G. Hoffman and G. Ibsen. While in these works Mixajlovskij criticized art for art sake and favoured a social and democratic approach in literature, he had his disagreements with the approach favoured by Marxist critics. On the whole,

Mixajlovskij remained a traditional critic.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 27: 611).

9. **Volynskij, Akim L'vovič** (pseudonym of A. Flekser, 1863-1923).

A decadent art and literary critic, Volynskij favoured art for art sake. He was one of the leading defenders of the new movement of Symbolism at the turn of the century. Volynskij attacked the materialistic positivism of contemporary radical writers, and advocated a rather vague and mystical idealism.

Volynskij's first work appeared in 1889 in the newspaper *Severnyj vestnik*. A collection of his articles published under the title *Russkie kritiki* (1896) are critical of so-called Revolutionary-Democratic writers, earning him the severe criticism of Lenin and others as reactionary. After 1917, Volynskij wrote mainly about ballet.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 9: 50; Harkins, 1956: 117).

10. **Korolenko, Vladimir Galaxtionovič**. (1853-1921).

A leading Russian writer, Korolenko was born in Žitomir to the family of a minor official. He was greatly influenced in his formative years by the democratic literature of the 1860s, especially the works of Nikolaj Černyševskij, Nikolaj Dobroljubov, Mixail Saltykov-Ščedrin, Nikolaj Nekrasov and Taras Ševčenko. Korolenko dropped out of the St. Petersburg Technological Institute for lack of funds, and took on various trades before entering the Agriculture and Forestry Academy in Moscow in 1874. He was later expelled from the institute for organizing protests

against the administration. Starting from 1879, Korolenko was imprisoned for various anti-government activities. He returned to the Russian part of the empire only in 1884, where he settled in Nižnij-Novgorod under police surveillance.

From an initial Populist approach in his first work (*Épisody iz žizni iskatelja*, 1879), Korolenko gave an exposition of realist views in his next two stories (*Jaška*, 1881; *Nastojaščij gorod*, 1881). Korolenko's main preoccupations included a realistic description of the life of ordinary people, a concern for people in general, and love of truth and freedom. *Čudnaja* (1880) and *Son Makara* (1885) which deal with the invincible courage of a female revolutionary and the protest of a Jakutsk peasant respectively are characteristic of this period of Korolenko's life. *Slepoj muzykant* probably typifies best Korolenko's view on ordinary people and their importance for the spiritual balance of the nation. Korolenko's work shows his immense knowledge of Russian reality and concern with the diminishing role of patriarchal Russia and the penetration of the countryside by capital. In a number of works written around 1905, Korolenko criticizes the feudal system and raises his voice on the inhuman nature of capitalism.

V golodnyj god (1892-93), *Multanskoe žertvoprinošenie* (1895-96), *Soročinskaja tragedija* (1907) and *Bytovoe javlenie* (1910) among others, reveal Korolenko's journalistic abilities. From the 1890s Korolenko worked on the editorial board of the liberal-populist newspaper *Russkoe bogatstvo*, where he expressed popular, liberal-bourgeois ideas. Korolenko's last major work (*Istorija moego sovremennika*, 1906-22) is not only biographical but a major historical document of

the time. In addition, Korolenko wrote literary critical articles and memoirs including such works as *Pamjati Belinskogo* (1898), *O Glebe Ivanoviče Uspenskom* (1902), *A.P. Čexov* (1904), *L.N. Tolstoj* (1908) and another on Gogol called *Tragedija velikogo jumorista* (1909).

It should be mentioned, for example, that while the Bol'ševiks considered Korolenko a progressive writer, they noted in *Pravda* in 1913 that he stood apart from the working class movement. He believed more in the potential of the peasant in the struggle against Czarism.

Korolenko was highly rated by his contemporaries such as Tolstoj, Čexov and Gor'kij. Younger writers like Gor'kij, A.S. Serafimovič and S. Podjačev among others credit Korolenko with helping them in their literary careers.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 23: 35-36).

12. **Solov'ev, Evgenij Andreevič** (pseudonym Andreevič, 1866-1905).

Russian literary historian and critic, Solov'ev is the author of several critical and biographical works about Vissarion Belinskij, Aleksandr Gercen, Dmitrij Pisarev, Lev Tolstoj and Maksim Gor'kij. In his works, Solov'ev upheld the liberty of the individual as the most important motif of 19th century Russian literature. Solov'ev collaborated with newspapers such as *Naučnoe obozrenie*, *Žizn'* and *Žurnal dlja vsex*.

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 40: 41).

13. **Skabičevskij, Aleksandr Mixajlovič**. (1838-1910).

Russian critic and literary historian. Born to a minor official in St. Petersburg, Skabičevskij finished St. Petersburg University in 1861. He started publishing by 1860. Beginning in 1868, Skabičevskij became a permanent contributor to *Otečestvennie zapiski* and from 1874 started writing literary pieces for Birževye vedomosti. Eventhough Skabičevskij grew under the influence of the Revolutionary-Democrats, his views differed substantially from those of Černyševskij and others. Skabičevskij held liberal views in several of his works including *Očerki razvitija progressivnyx idej v našem obščestve. 1825-1860gg.* (1872), *Istorija novejšej russkoj literatury 1848-1890gg.* (1891), *Očerki istorij russkoj cenzury. (1700-1863).* (1892).

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija.* 39: 196).

14. **Čukovskij, Kornej Ivanovič**. (1882-date n.a.).

Russian Soviet writer, children's poet, literary specialist, translator and recipient of the Lenin Award. Born in St. Petersburg, Čukovskij's first article appeared in the newspaper *Odesskie novosti* in 1901. In 1905, he became the editor of the satirical anti-czarist newspaper *Signal* for which he was put under police surveillance. He later worked for liberal papers. Čukovskij painted a number of literary portraits in several works including *Ot Čexova do našix dnej.* (1908), *Poézija grjadujuščej demokratii. W. Whitman.* (1914), *Kniga o sovremennyx pisateljax.* (1914), *Lica i maski.* (1914). His repertoire of children's literature include *Ot dvux do pjati.* (1956.

First published as *Malenkie deti* in 1925), *Krokodil*. (1916), *Moj dodyr*. (1923), *Tarakanišče*. (1924), *Muxa Cokotuxa* (1927 and *Barmalej* (1926).

Čukovskij's main interest as a literary specialist lay in the Democratic literature of the 1860s and 70s (*Ljudi i knigi šestidesjatyx godov*, 1934). He contributed immensely to collecting and organizing the work of Nekrasov (*Masterstvo Nekrasova*, 1934, 1955). Čukoskij's memoirs are collected in the book *Repin. Gor'kij. Majakovskij. Brjusov*. (1940).

(*Bol'šaja Sovetskaja Énciklopedija*. 47: 464).

15. **Zinaida, Nikolaevna Gippius** (pseudonym, Anton Krajnij, 1869-1945).

Gippius came from an aristocratic family and was educated by tutors. She married D. Merežkovskij in 1889. Their literary careers proceeded independently, although they shared the same political, philosophical and religious views. Gippius started out as a successful short story writer and developed into one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Her poetry is elegant, masterly, inventive and original in its language and imagery. Death, devil and netherworld are a strong presence in Gippius' poetry. She was also a first-rate literary critic.

Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature*, New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1991, 417-18).

16. **Vengerov, Semen Afanasevič** (1855-1920)

Russian literary historian and bibliographer. He studied in the Faculty of Law, History and Philology in St. Petersburg. An idealist, Vengerov was a leading representative of the so-called cultural-historical method. At the beginning, he sympathized with "Narodnaja volja" and was close to the Populists in the 1880s and 90s. He later supported the bourgeois-constitutionalists. In 1889, Vengerov was removed from his teaching position at the University in St. Petersburg, and only returned to the job after 1905.

Vengerov laid out his main views on literature in two works: *Geroičeskij xarakter russkoj literatury* (1911), and *V čem očarovanie russkoj literatury?* (1912). Vengerov was widely respected as an objective critic. Nevertheless, he maintained in these two major works that Russian literature had never occupied itself entirely with purely artistic concerns. Instead, he argued that it always had a strong didactic component. Vengerov opposed the class struggle.

Vengerov's bibliographical works include the six-volume *Kritiko-biografičeskij slovar' russkix pisatelej i učenyx (ot načala russkoj obrazovannosti do našix dnej).* (1889-1904); *Russkie knigi* (1896-98) in three volumes and the four-volume *Istočniki slovarja russkix pisatelej.* (1900-17). Vengerov also edited several other important works, including: *Russkaja poezija* (4 Vols,1893-1901), *Russkaja literatura XX veka (1890-1910)* (1914-17), as well the first Complete Collected Works of V.G. Belinskij, which was published posthumously. From 1901 onward, *Biblioteka velikix pisatelej*, was published under the editorship of Vengerov. This series comprised complete

academic collections of the works of Puškin, Shakespeare, Schiller, Byron and Molière, among others.